

Reasoning from a Tradition–Constituted Ground:

MacIntyre's Criticisms of Liberalism

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Abstract

MacIntyre's tradition-constituted account of rationality is part of a fresh approach to rationality in the twentieth century lead by Thomas Kuhn. Yet the scope and extension of MacIntyre's account of rationality, as well as its focus on practical areas such as morality and justice, have distinguished it from similar accounts.

In this work, I shall explain and defend MacIntyre's account of rationality and its implications for justice in contrast to the account endorsed by liberalism in general, and Rawlsian liberalism in particular. In the first chapter, I illustrate his account of rationality by sketching the lines of interdependence that MacIntyre draws between sixteenth and seventeenth century Scottish social, cultural, economic, and political convictions, practices, and institutions on one hand, and modes of comprehension and justification for factual belief and right action on the other. I will show that this sketch supports MacIntyre's view of rationality against liberal rationality in two key ways: first, his historical narration clashes with what has been presented as historical evidence for the liberal tenet of reasonable pluralism, and secondly, his understanding of history supports the essentially tradition-bound nature of understanding and justification.

After specifying tradition-constituted rationality in contrast to universal rationality, in Chapter Two, I discuss and defend the criticisms that MacIntyre makes of liberal rationality and justice. These criticisms, I shall argue, are developed from outside of the dominant liberal discourse, and thus address and undermine the basic principles of liberalism. Such a confrontation of MacIntyre with liberalism brings out the meta-philosophical nature of their views of rationality. Two contesting views of rationality are parts of incompatible traditions adoption of which cannot be based on some impartial purely theoretical principles. Such a view of rationality, as I shall argue, is entailed by MacIntyre's tradition-constituted account of rationality and involves a relativism that MacIntyre is unable to circumvent.

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my former professor, Saeed Zibakalam, whose inspirations were my guide throughout this work. I would also like to dedicate this thesis to my beloved husband, Ahmad; only with his invaluable support could my productive philosophical endeavors begin and endure.

Table of Contents

PERMISSION TO USE	i
Abstract	ii
Acknowledgments	iii
DEDICATION	iv
Table of Contents	v
Introduction	1
1. Tradition	10
1.1 The Shift of Questions	13
1.2 Principles of Reasoning in a Tradition	20
1.2.1 Characteristics of Scottish Tradition	21
1.2.2 Social and Intellectual Clashes in Heresy Trials	23
1.2.3 Hume's Subversion	26
1.3 Practices: Constitutional to Tradition	30
1.4 Conclusion	32
2. MacIntyre's Criticism of Liberalism	34
2.1 MacIntyre's Criticism of the Liberal Treatment of the Good	35
2.2 MacIntyre's Criticism of Liberalism's Claims to Neutrality and Objectivity	40
2.3 MacIntyre's Criticism as to Desert/Entitlement	43
2.4 Objections to MacIntyre's Criticisms of liberalism	45
2.5 Defending MacIntyre Against Objections	47
2.6 Incommensurability: Kuhn	50
2.7 Implications of Incommensurability for Rational Interactions	54
2.8 Incommensurability: Rawls and MacIntyre	61

2.9 Does Incommensurability legitimize Immoralities and Injustices?	67
2.10 Rationality of Traditions	68
3. Conclusion	72
Works Cited	76

Introduction

How can we decide between competing conceptions of justice? Can we resort to some independent unbiased principles of rationality for evaluating and judging between two theories of justice competing for our allegiance? These principal questions concern Alasdair MacIntyre throughout his book *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (hereafter *WJWR*). They are also the central organizing questions of the present work in its MacIntyrean treatment of justice and its rational grounds. As MacIntyre argues in his book, when we inquire into universal neutral principles of rationality, we are confronted with the same diversity and incompatibility which we have encountered in theories of justice (*WJWR* 321). In fact, “different and incompatible conceptions of justice are characteristically closely linked to different and incompatible conceptions of practical rationality” (*WJWR* IX).

MacIntyre contends that each of the four major accounts of rationality and the related conceptions of justice which he expounds in his book are both formed within and inform a specific *tradition of inquiry* which is essentially characterized by related social, cultural, economic, and political particularities. He also argues that even liberalism which initially aspired to transcend the limitations of tradition, itself gradually turns into a specific tradition. Such a history of various accounts of rationality, always embedded in contingent traditions, MacIntyre concludes, precludes the possibility of neutral and universal principles of reason. Such neutral principles would be valid independent of the particularities of any tradition, and all human beings would be able to comprehend and find them compelling in virtue of their individual attributes. The recognition that there are no neutral principles results in a second conclusion that there is equally no universal conception of justice which can be appealed to for moral evaluation of, or be legitimately applicable to, different societies. One tradition which has strongly opposed these conclusions is

liberalism. MacIntyre acknowledges the importance of adequately answering liberalism's claims for a tradition-free rationality and the theories of justice it shapes (*WJWR*). He nevertheless does not undertake the task of illustrating the tradition that liberalism has unintentionally grown into:

This book has presented an outline narrative history of three traditions of enquiry into what practical rationality is and what justice is, and in addition an acknowledgement of a need for the writing of a narrative history of a fourth tradition, that of liberalism. (*WJWR* 349)

MacIntyre thinks his project of rendering the rationality, and hence related theories of justice, as embodiments of particular and contingent traditions also requires formulating liberalism as a tradition. Although he does not narrate the tradition that liberalism constitutes, he criticizes in *WJWR*, and his other works, liberalism's claims to universal principles of rationality. Undermining liberalism's universal claims would definitely corroborate the case for the possibility and validity of such narration. There is an interdependence between rejecting liberalism's claims to tradition-free principles of rationality on the one hand, and showing that liberalism itself is framed within a tradition on the other. In the present exploration, I will defend MacIntyre's view of justice and rationality and discuss the extent to which MacIntyre can consistently reject liberalism's claims for universal principles of reason. In this endeavor, I will bring up, as MacIntyre does on some occasions for the sake of concrete illustration, the views of the recently well-received liberal thinker John Rawls. Although MacIntyre does not develop a separate criticism of Rawls, MacIntyre's occasional attacks on his theory of justice provide us with the particular points of conflict between two accounts of rationality and justice.

It is good to bear in mind from the outset that MacIntyre consider himself part of a philosophical tradition that endorses a Thomistic reading of Aristotelian virtue ethics. According to MacIntyre, the good for each species, including humans, consists in moving towards the end which, “qua the members of that species”, constitutes their perfection. (“Privatization of The Good” 344). MacIntyre holds that the moral good can only be internally related to our practices which, in conjunction with his view of incommensurability of various philosophical accounts of morality, distinguishes him among moral philosophers.

MacIntyre’s theory of rationality and justice is articulated and argued for based on a narration of the ways in which four leading accounts of justice and practical reason have been developed and exercised within what he calls a “tradition of inquiry”. He has named these traditions after philosophers who had a crucial influence on them, whether constructive or destructive: Aristotle, Saint Augustine, Aquinas, and Hume. Yet a tradition of inquiry involves far more than mere philosophical conceptions and theories; a tradition of inquiry is constructed of a coalescence of lines of continuous intellectual advancements and the social, cultural, and political practices and institutions of a particular society within a certain period and place. The consequent particularity of intellectual inquiries which MacIntyre seeks to establish is a crucial one: it is not confined to the questions and ideas arising from a current state of affairs, but more fundamental to any attitude, principle, or mode of reasoning which shape comprehension and justification.

What is MacIntyre’s understanding of tradition—constituted and tradition—constitutive rationality? MacIntyre contends that persistent and influential theories in topics as diverse as the conception of justice, authority of law, fundamental moral principles, human nature, the existence and nature of God, and laws of nature have been bound to the particularities of a specific social and cultural environment. For instance, the structure, expectations, and goals of the educational

system, the social status and responsibilities of a philosopher, reciprocal influences of cultural, religious, and political institutions of the seventeenth and eighteenth century Scotland were formative to Stair's, Hutcheson's and Hume's modes of thought and attitudes and they posed specific questions, complications, and inconsistencies for each philosopher. Providing solutions to those questions and issues led to intellectual advancements and new theories. These advancements, in turn, gave rise to subtler issues and problems that could not previously be articulated. Such advancements also persistently shape and reshape their mother society from the outset. Constant interactions and exchanges between social and cultural beliefs, practices, and institutions on the one hand and intellectual inquiries on the other characterize what MacIntyre names a "tradition of inquiry," which he distinguishes from mere social and cultural tradition.

What distinguishes this rather obvious image of the genesis and development of intellectual inquiries from a generally accepted fact is the way *justification* and *appeal to principles* at work in theoretical endeavors are deeply affected by and reflect the actual social and cultural relationships of a tradition. So the relationship of the social and cultural order to associated intellectual inquiries is not confined to that of evoking questions, as I have been suggesting in the last paragraph. The social and cultural structures of a society provide intellectual inquiries with authorities, such as accepted practices, principles and institutions, by appeal only to which one can validly justify claims and theories. According to MacIntyre, such authority cannot be the rationality often characterized as the fundamental characteristic of *all* humans by virtue of which they communicate and understand each other. Such universal rationality is often depicted as the ground for impartial arguments and statements, arguments that can, in turn, found further potential mutual agreement. Of course, MacIntyre does not deny that rationality is the basis for mutual understanding and agreement, but he questions whether it does so in virtue of any *universal*

inherent quality of humans as such. What makes holding a belief, performing a public or private action, following a practice, or the premises and arguments of a theory of justice reasonable depends chiefly on deeply established structures and ways of living, on relating in an associated social and cultural world. We should nevertheless be careful not to take these structures as given facts which determine what strikes us as reasonable and justified on the basis of some arbitrary and contingent *status quo*. Rather, these structures are themselves conceptualized, that is, described and explained, based on a view of the social world that is concurrent with certain types of practices and judgments previously deemed justified or moral. In other words, according to MacIntyre, there is an interdependence between what we conceive as the authoritative principles and practices of a society, the way we conceptualize and describe them, and the rationality which governs such conceptualization and describing.

One might be wondering what role tradition plays in this explanation. MacIntyre elucidates interactions between intellectual inquiries and the social order, and, by that means, the principles of rationality, by placing them within the conceptual body of *tradition*. Tradition's first and most obviously significant role lies in its unifying all the elements informing rationality under an overarching conception. It is under such an overarching conception that we can identify the interactions of the elements I mentioned in the last paragraph and their interdependence on rationality. The second role that tradition plays in articulating MacIntyre's conception of rationality is its capturing and conceptualizing the existence of radically dissimilar societies. MacIntyre contends that these social orders have assumed and embodied rationalities, and thereby theories of justice, which are equally incompatible.¹ Consequently, we are confronted by diverse

¹ My discussion here is about the principles of rationality and their role in deciding between different theories of justice. I should nevertheless clarify that the rationality MacIntyre is concerned with has a wider and more

societies, practices, and beliefs, embodying incompatible intellectual systems and thereby rationalities, that can be rightly understood and appraised only when all related parts are integrated into a comprehensive system, i.e., tradition.

MacIntyre's conception of rationality is based on two major claims. The first claim is the one I have been explicitly concerned with thus far. That is, rational principles and procedures are essentially conceived and reconceived through constant interactions of intellectual endeavors and social and cultural realities. The second, and definitely more controversial, claim is that rationalities thus conceived within the traditions have been left with *no universal and neutral principles of rationality independent of all traditions*. The first claim does not necessarily entail the second one, but it can be consistently inferred from the second.

It is helpful to compare these two claims to a seemingly similar thought: the uncontroversial thought that intellectual inquiries and theories are influenced by the particularities of their time and society is neither original nor controversial. In fact, this thought is a crucial premise of many contemporary sociological, psychological, economic, and recently neuroscientific inquiries. Yet many such investigations may still assume that differences in terminologies, articulations, and formulations of rational principles and procedures in different times and places do not mean that there are different rationalities. They might assume that different accounts of rationality are still somehow founded on invariable precepts of reason which are only

comprehensive scope. Tradition-constituted rationality not only guides practical intellectual inquiries in ethics and politics, but it also grounds theoretical inquiries of science and mathematics. For instance, MacIntyre thinks that appealing to first principles that express some evident necessary truth, was not limited to philosophical inquiries of the Scottish tradition. They were equally pervasive in science and mathematics, "Galileo himself retained the idiom of Aristotelian demonstration has pointed to the way in which [as McMullin says] 'some of the principles of mechanics may easily seem so plausible as almost to take on the status of necessary truths' ('The Conception of Science in Galileo's Work' in *New Perspectives on Galileo*, ed. R.E. Butts and J.C. Pitts, Dordrecht, 1978, p. 229) [...] we may remove McMullin's qualifying 'almost' and say that for many in the seventeenth century the first principles of mechanics, as of every other science, were assigned the status of necessary truths" (WJWR 225).

contingently hidden from us. To the contrary, according to MacIntyre our inability to ever formulate without controversy such covert underlying rational precepts should make us seriously doubt their existence. The lack of such universally accepted precepts of reason, especially after the failure of the Enlightenment to formulate them, is the best evidence that there are none. There being none will leave the plurality of different accounts of practical rationality, originally articulated in hope of capturing universal precepts of reason, without a neutral criterion for vindication/evaluation in the face of their opponents. In the same way, I shall argue, theories of justice based on various accounts of rationality cannot invoke some universal principles of reason in order to vindicate themselves without somehow presupposing themselves, nor can they impartially evaluate their opponents.

Here, I draw an outline of the chapters by pointing out key conceptions and issues involved in MacIntyre's two major contentions. In the first chapter, I clarify MacIntyre's conceptions of tradition and rationality by briefly bringing in his narration of Scottish tradition's transition from Aristotelian rationality to Humean reason. As I shall show, MacIntyre's tradition-constituted rationality is best supported by the explanatory power of his narrations. By the same token, this can only be rightly understood by examining his narrations, at least partly. Such examination should also illuminate the conception of tradition. Presented with competing theories, beliefs, and practices, how can we recognize whether we are facing ideas developed within one and the same tradition that maintains some continuity despite differences and oppositions, or two or more traditions? In other words, what makes a theory or social and cultural structure in comparison to its antecedents an *advancement* or *regression* within one and the same tradition, rather than a *transformation* into another tradition? Answers to these questions should become clear during my discussions of the Scottish tradition in this chapter. During my exploration of MacIntyre's

narration of Scottish tradition, I shall also argue that MacIntyre's historical reconstruction undermines the supposed historical "fact" of reasonable pluralism that is pivotal to defending liberal rationality.

In the second chapter, I will explore the strengths and limitations of MacIntyre's approach to rationality in the face of liberal rationality and suggest some ways in which MacIntyre could defend and strengthen his theory of rationality. I begin by considering what MacIntyre has explicitly said about Rawls's theory of justice, and develop his rather sporadic remarks on Rawls and more generally on liberalism into three main arguments. I shall then draw attention to presuppositions of MacIntyre's criticisms about the necessity of a conception of human good for morality, justice, and more generally, for any area in which we exercise practical reason. MacIntyre's assumptions about practical reason raise worries about the circularity of his criticisms of liberalism. Such worries bring out MacIntyre's meta-philosophical views of reasoning and justification, chiefly embodied in the conception of traditions of inquiry. According to MacIntyre's tradition-constituted account of rationality, intellectual activities such as evaluating, criticizing, and justifying can only be formed and effectively used within a tradition of inquiry. Addressing particular arguments for universal principles of liberal rationality and by the same token liberal justice, in any substantial form, require concurrence with at least some central facts or principles of liberalism. Thus, I shall argue, criticisms of liberalism advanced from a Thomistic tradition necessarily presuppose tenets of Thomism and reject the primary foundations of liberalism. Indeed, according to tradition-constituted rationality, the perspective from which one advances critical evaluation cannot be determined based on some tradition-free principles or procedures. Choosing between two contesting approaches such as those of MacIntyre and Rawls is itself possible only from a standpoint and within a framework.

Thus, I shall identify two main aspects of MacIntyre's confrontation with liberal claims to impartial, tradition-free rationality. First, a philosophical aspect, from which MacIntyre criticizes liberalism for not only failing to propose principles and procedures of understanding and justification genuinely neutral as to rival systems of thought and action, but also for rendering moral rules indefinite and reducing justice into regulative rules for maintaining a specific social and political order. Secondly, a meta-philosophical aspect, from which MacIntyre takes issue with liberalism about the nature and limitations of reasoning and justification by introducing the conception of incompatible traditions of inquiry. I shall contend that MacIntyre's meta-philosophical view of reasoning entails that his Thomistic approaches to practical reason, morality, and justice are incommensurable with those of liberalism. I shall further argue that MacIntyre's meta-philosophical theory of incompatible rationalities does not undermine the liberal view of universal comprehension and justification, but is instead incompatible with it.

I conclude Chapter Two by revisiting the central concern of my thesis with which I began. How can we decide between competing accounts of practical rationality and, by extension, between competing accounts of justice? If there are no universal principles of reason to appeal to in order to decide between competing traditions, and I agree with MacIntyre that there are none, must not we accept relativism? MacIntyre responds negatively to this question by bringing in the conception of a rationality that governs all traditions and accommodates for rational contact between alien traditions of inquiry. I, nevertheless, shall show that his response is in fundamental disagreement with his tradition-informed account of rationality. In this interpretation of MacIntyre, I shall concur with those readings of MacIntyre that recognize the inherent relativity of evaluation of all traditions.

1. Tradition

MacIntyre's conception of a tradition of inquiry shows how we find various claims and arguments reasonable not only in philosophy, but in social arenas, as well. His exploration brings out the dynamic of interactions between intellectual inquiries and associated social and cultural structures and practices within a tradition. In this and the next chapter, I shall argue that all reasonable systems of justice are not only highly fitted to a specific tradition, but could not be otherwise.

MacIntyre illustrates his conception of a tradition of inquiry by sketching four distinct traditions. His book *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* is the narration of these four consecutive traditions. He begins with the tradition of Aristotle, commencing with Homer and extending to Augustine. He then explains the tradition of Aquinas by seeing it as the result of a synthesis between the Aristotelian tradition and Christianity. The tradition of the Scottish enlightenment is marked by Hume. Finally, he ends with the post-enlightenment tradition of liberalism. The narration of these traditions takes up the bulk of the book to the point where one should acknowledge the significance of this narration independent of serving as mere examples (*WJWR* 10). MacIntyre's exposition of these traditions not only elucidates but also *justifies* his idea of practical reasoning as essentially constituted by and applicable in some specific tradition so that each is inherently incomparable with those belonging to other traditions.¹ The justificatory force of such narrations relies on their ability to express concrete lines of continuity in beliefs, concepts,

¹ MacIntyre acknowledges some modern analytic theories of practical reasoning have been deprived of social and cultural context ("Precise of *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*" 151). He nevertheless claims these theories do not go beyond the "liberal individualist culture" they have been advanced from.

questions, and the related ways of reasoning in a tradition, equally revealed in both intellectual and social domains on the one hand, and the fundamental dissimilarity in narrations developed in competing traditions on the other.

Furthermore, as noted earlier, MacIntyre intends the conception of tradition to lay the ground work for a fair evaluation of different accounts of rationality that does not necessarily impugn them by imposing hostile standards. His striving for fairness does not mean the evaluation MacIntyre promotes is itself neutral in its judgments. MacIntyre is not narrating, nor does he claim to be narrating, an objective account of the evolution of some crucial intellectual inquiries which as such undermine any claim for universal principles of rationality. The very nature of narrating different theories of rationality and justice within traditions of inquiry is anti-enlightenment and anti-liberal. However, I would argue that the anti-liberal foundations of MacIntyre's project does not necessarily mean his arguments are circular. If he could not articulate an alternative comprehensive and plausible account of influential traditions of inquiry to that of liberalism, then his arguments against liberalism would automatically fail. Thus, if his tradition-based narration proves viable and plausible, we have a powerful account of a local reason driving intellectual inquiries in their totality, that is, developing theories, advancing criticisms, making rational progress, and so on, yet its acceptance unavoidably involves rejection of the narration central to liberalism in general and to Rawls's liberalism in particular. So given the pivotal significance of MacIntyre's narrations, reconstructing and developing MacIntyre's critique of liberal rationality and Rawls's theory of justice must include MacIntyre's narration and cannot be limited to his explicit critical remarks. MacIntyre has especially presented these arguments in his chapter "Liberalism Transformed into a Tradition," which is placed towards the end of *WJWR*. If his narration of remarkable theories of philosophy embedded in the social and cultural life proves

compelling in the earlier chapters, then he has already articulated his most forceful argument against liberalism's claims for neutral and universal rationality. Therefore, although I will deal with his more specific criticism of liberalism in Chapter Two, his most powerful arguments against liberalism, as I read him in my thesis, lies in the plausibility of his narrations.

Among the traditions MacIntyre portrays in *WJWR*, he especially refers to the Scottish tradition of seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a concern he develops in his other works, illustrating the evolution of a conception of practical reason in relation to the moral and social practices of its tradition (see chapters 11-16 in *WJWR* and also "Practical Rationalities as Forms of Social Structures"). In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the intellectual, social, and cultural arenas of Scotland are shaped and dominated by Aristotelianism. Such Aristotelian structure is especially significant to the present work. The Scottish tradition embodies a society organized around certain views of the good life, or as Rawls would call it, a comprehensive doctrine, which *as such*, Rawls thinks is opposed to liberal societies. From a liberal perspective, one assumes the historical fact of reasonable pluralism, "a continuing shared adherence to one comprehensive doctrine can be maintained only by the oppressive use of state power, with all its official crimes and the inevitable brutality and cruelties, followed by the corruption of religion, philosophy, and science" (Ibid. 34). From liberal perspective the story of the failure of the Scottish tradition would be different from the narration MacIntyre provides. In narrating the Scottish tradition's declination and how, in theory and practice, it has been succeeded by a liberal tradition, MacIntyre is offering an alternative counter-liberal explanation. The significance of such an explanation lies in its reconstructing the social and intellectual structures of Scotland in the Enlightenment era with its particular, rather than universal, view of the good. In MacIntyre's narration of the Scottish tradition, having a particular view of the good, interestingly enough, does

not prevent the tradition from failing or oppressive means being used to maintain it. This story contrast how liberals might tell the story.

MacIntyre's narration of the Scottish tradition is the story of the failure of a tradition. In showing the interdependence of practical reasoning and the established social order, MacIntyre explains the Scottish tradition's confrontations with a series of internal and external challenges that eventually undermined its Calvinistic and Aristotelian intellectual and social structures. He argues that Hume concluded these challenges by exerting a destructive impact on the Scottish tradition. For this reason, MacIntyre also calls this tradition "Hume's tradition," a name that only applies negatively.

I have identified three distinct areas in MacIntyre's narration that were decisive in the failure of the Scottish tradition: the type of questions which dominated the social and intellectual domains, the principles and authorities to which appeals were made in arguments and reasoning, and the intellectual institutions which educated and promulgated specific ways of questioning and reasoning. These areas not only marked critical areas of success or failure for the Scottish tradition, but together, they specify the kind of rationality tied to the particularities of this tradition in its theoretical and practical manifestations.

1.1 The Shift of Questions

The Scottish tradition of inquiry was under the heavy political, social, and intellectual influences of an Anglicized world that played a crucial role in challenging its established structure and thereby reshaping and eventually undermining it. In the political realm, Scotland lost her sovereignty to England in 1707 (*WJWR* 219). In the social arena, English manners, dialect, and ways of life became increasingly pervasive. Finally, in the intellectual sphere, members of the

educated class either studied in English schools or, if they stayed at home, were influenced by the works of English thinkers. In the following paragraphs, I will briefly look at the social and cultural characteristics of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries Anglicized world which MacIntyre thinks is best exemplified in England (*WJWR* 215).

MacIntyre describes the English social and political structures of the eighteenth century as being founded mainly on possessions and the individual's capabilities for reciprocal satisfaction of passions and provision of interests. The fundamental economic and social relationships were characterized "in terms of who provides what for whom and who threatens the prospects of enjoyment and satisfaction for whom by the way in which they pursue their own enjoyment and satisfaction" (*WJWR* 215). It is just a such social and economic order that later concerns intellectuals, especially philosophers, with the place and role of passions in people's thoughts and actions: "Are the passions exclusively the motivating force of human action?, When rational calculation shows someone that the expression of some passion presently felt in action will not be to their longer term interest, how is that passion to be inhibited?, Can reason be an independently motivating force?" (*WJWR* 213).

Of course, the Aristotelian tradition of Scotland had ample intellectual resources to deal "adequately" with and provide "reasonable" answers to these questions, resources that took some bright scholars centuries to articulate and develop. Contrary to Hume, Aristotelians held that reason can motive action. Nevertheless, MacIntyre argues that what constitutes a decisive criterion of an "adequate" and "reasonable" response to the above questions, far beyond formal considerations of coherency and comprehension, is inevitably formed by how practical reason, passion, and the relationship between the two are perceived and exercised in society. That the genesis of these questions were the social and economic structures of the English milieu meant

that these questions would not only challenge the Aristotelian view of Scottish society as a mere opponent, but an opponent which just happened to be alien to precepts of the English society. Asking those questions from the passion-centered social background presupposed the falsity of the Aristotelian view. MacIntyre's explanation of what actually was the case, i.e., appealing to passion-centered principles in judgment and action, is rich and illuminating:

The social classification of individuals would be in terms of what they consume and enjoy, or at least aspire to consume and enjoy, and of what they bring about in the way of consumption and enjoyment for others ... So the individual as propertied, as property owner or as propertyless, is the unit of social life, and the rules governing the distribution and exchange of property are an integral part of the rules constituting the system of social exchange. ...

The dominant standards to which appeal is made in such a type of social order will be such that to express them is to endorse the standpoint of mutual reciprocity in the exchange of benefits ... Thus to appeal to standards— moral, aesthetic, political standards of right judgment and action— will itself be a form of participation in the shared transaction of social exchange. The standards themselves will function within and as an expression of this form of political and social order. (*WJWR* 215-16)

Thus, it is clear why Hume's view of the subordinate nature of reason to passion and the causality of passion to action should strike one as reasonable and insightful in such a society. English society was not only one where actions were governed according to principles for providing mutual satisfaction of passion and interests, but, in MacIntyre's view, one could not act unless her or his actions would be understood according to or against those principles (*WJWR* 215-

16). As Scottish society increasingly adopted English ways of living, Scottish philosophers came to ask related questions tied to Anglicized ways of living. These questions concerned the nature of and relationship between passion and reason, yet the idea of the priority of passion to reason in the genesis of action was built into the questions themselves, and as such they were to preclude the totality of the Aristotelian framework. Why Anglicized social and economic relationships based on reciprocal satisfaction of passion and interest eventually came to overcome the Scottish tradition is the story which MacIntyre thinks is intertwined with this development of a new view of passion by Scottish philosophers. In sections 1.2.1 and 1.2.2, I shall primarily explain MacIntyre's view on the kinds of transformations in philosophical practices and institutions that this conquest entails.

According to MacIntyre, the Scottish tradition was also suffering from an internal disorder partly brought about by recurring political and social ruptures. Such ruptures were not an exclusive challenge to Scotland for they swept throughout Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. As the persistent fights and disputes across the continent resisted various solutions, a perception of failure on the part of the political and social institutions spread, which MacIntyre thinks finally contributed to the rejection of Aristotelianism from social and intellectual life (*WJWR* 209). However, it required the claims of the modern state for restoring sustainable order, abstracted from any conception of the good, to transform an internal problem to be solved within social and political structure of tradition into its demolisher. Advocates of the modern state and market economy, MacIntyre maintains, promoted such transformation by defining new terms for debate. These new terms defined the problem in an individualistic way antagonistic to the Aristotelian tradition; i.e., "What kind of principles can require and secure allegiance in and to a form of social order in which individuals who are pursuing diverse and often incompatible conceptions of the

good can live together without the disrupts of rebellion and internal war?” (*WJWR* 210). Such a question, MacIntyre notices, could not be formulated in an Aristotelian framework. From the perspective of this question, and contrary to Aristotle’s view, one’s identity can be characterized as an individual, informed and understood apart from any community. However for Aristotle, a community organizes around a definite conception of good and, as such, contrary to an individualistic society, provides the reasons for abiding by it (*WJWR* 210). Thus, the question formulates a new understanding of individuals and their relationships in society incompatible with the Aristotelian view of community and its members for developing effective solutions. Such an understanding of individuals excludes the Aristotelian view of the community as the source of the problem. Clearly, when such a question becomes dominant, it brings about social and political attitudes and intellectual endeavors which undermine the Aristotelian Scottish tradition.

MacIntyre’s views on the genesis of the quest for a social and political structure that might reconcile conflicting conceptions of good is different from the views of Rawls, a thinker perfectly representing liberalism in this regard.¹ Three important factors, in MacIntyre’s view, contributed to the quest for value-free principles of organizing society coming to prevail: resolution-defying conflicts, a state of desperation and a perception of the sterility of Aristotelian resources, and claims of the rising modern state and market economy to overcome perceived insoluble strife. These three factors are not independent. As to the perception of failure and sterility of Aristotelianism, liberals have presumed it is for the most part the result of the growing complexity of problems exacerbated by the irrelevance of Aristotelian resources. But Aristotelian resources

¹ In the opening of *Justice as Fairness* Rawls declares, “One historical origin of liberalism is the Wars of Religion in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries following the Reformation”. (1)

were rendered irrelevant due to the new formulations of problems, namely the political structure assuming one particular conception of good. As mentioned in the last paragraph, in MacIntyre's view, these new formulations of problems were based on a society envisaged increasingly as individualistic in which one's identity is independent of and prior to society. Consequently, any conception of good that is to shape the social and political structures will be seen as an external imposition. Clearly, according to MacIntyre, the perception of failure and sterility of Aristotelianism did not *occasion*, as liberals often say, but rather *augmented*, the social and political project of liberalism in its quest for new universal principles of practical rationality shared with all humans regardless of their conception of good. I think MacIntyre would also affirm that if, during the ruptures of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the claims of liberalism were absent, the growing problems of Aristotelians might have been interpreted in favor of traditions other than liberalism, eventually solved within the framework of the tradition, or not solved at all.

However, there is one point of disagreement I have with MacIntyre's account of the transition from Aristotelian tradition to a liberal tradition. Contrary to MacIntyre, I think at the time when Aristotelians were struggling with aforementioned problems, there was no generally accepted yardstick whereby one could calculate and thereby discover that problems are too many and/or too complex for a tradition's resources, or that internal inconsistencies and contradictions are so problematic that the tradition has failed. Only in retrospect can we so judge. The significance of this issue will become clearer when we are confronted with the question of the rational evaluation of incompatible traditions which I will discuss in detail in Chapter Three.

We must take account of such concerns for explaining the historical genesis of the liberal quest. Where MacIntyre exposes the question and ponders it, Rawls takes the question largely for granted. On those rare occasions when Rawls does mention the significance of the question, he

holds the liberal quest for universal principles of justice as in part based on the historical fact of reasonable pluralism in liberal societies. Thus, from Rawls's liberal perspective, we come to ask how can we maintain a just political order in a society consisting of individuals with conflicting conceptions of good without using oppressive means. The starting point of Rawls's argument is the immediate rejection of all social and political structures which are organized around one specific conception of good:

To illustrate: there are various ways of specifying the central idea of social cooperation. As we noted, we might say that the fair terms of cooperation are fixed by natural law viewed either as God's law or as given by a prior and independent moral order publicly known by rational intuition. Such ways of fixing those terms have not been excluded by deductive argument: for instance, by showing them to be incompatible with the idea of social cooperation. Instead, they are ruled out by the historical conditions and the public culture of democracy that set the requirements for a political conception of justice in a modern constitutional regime. (*Justice as Fairness* 25)

In framing his argument, Rawls is, like any other liberal thinker, presupposing the current state of modern societies, with heavy prejudice against those past or present traditions which are non-liberal. Although this presupposition does not invalidate his arguments within the boundaries of liberal tradition, it put into question the validity of his argument in the face of non-liberal traditions.

To sum up, I looked briefly into two principal problems which challenged the Scottish tradition. First, the question of the nature of and relationship between practical reason and passion. This question, in its very formulation, presupposes a priority of passion to reason in which passion

employs reason to achieve its goals. Secondly, there was the question of some organizing principles of society which can obtain the allegiance of all rational humans apart from their specific conceptions of the good. The Aristotelian tradition was opposed to the solutions these questions were suggesting. First, Scotland's Aristotelian tradition had practical reason as the master of passion and sole provider of not only good reasons, but any reason for judgment and action. Second, this Aristotelian tradition was founded on conceptions of the *polis* and "divinely legislated order" organizing the community around a definite conception of the good, but so organizing in virtue of its inhabitants already identifying themselves by some social role in the community (MacIntyre, *WJWR* 210). These challenging questions were pivotal for Scotland's society turning to a view of the world hostile to the Aristotelian and Augustinian tradition. They also set a new framework for social as well as intellectual inquiries in which the standards of justification for reasonable judgment and action were inevitably tied to this new view of the world.

1.2 Principles of Reasoning in a Tradition

While sketching the various stages of the clash between the Scottish tradition and the Anglicized view, MacIntyre spells out conflicting principles of practical reason which either side employed. Here, I draw on three instances in which MacIntyre narrates these clashes. First, I briefly look at some principles of Stair's thought which MacIntyre thinks represent the Scottish tradition and contrast him with his English counterpart, Blackstone. Secondly, I examine two competing, though transitory accounts of reason which clash in heresy trials of the first part of eighteenth century. Thirdly, I briefly list Hume's view of the principles of rationality governing different areas of intellectual and social life which reflect some chief organizing principles of Anglicized social order.

1.2.1 Characteristics of Scottish Tradition

Sir James Dalrymple of Stair, a Scottish Aristotelian philosopher of law, states that two primary conceptions ground the principles of law: “equity or rights and good, useful, or expedient” (*WJWR* 227). Nevertheless, the principle of usefulness and expediency is only subordinate to and definable in terms of equity or right. Rights are assured through the primary obligation to God and his law (*Ibid.*). Reason apprehends both principles, Stair argues, without needing further argumentation. MacIntyre notices that in areas in which Stair is less known, such as philosophy and natural science, he consistently affirms the same attitude towards principles of reason and their relation. In fact, he maintained that the principles of philosophy and natural sciences, like those in law, can be inferred from one and the same set of primary principles, the subject matter of which is theological (*WJWR* 233-34).

MacIntyre contrasts this view of reason and its basis in theological principles with an eighteenth century English philosopher of law, Sir William Blackstone. At first sight, it seems Blackstone is also appealing to such reason in drawing his first principles of law. But God, whose laws and will Blackstone is appealing to, is flexible enough to conform to whatever is actually the case with the then perceived nature of humans:

He [God] has been pleased so to contrive the constitution and frame of humanity, that we should want no other prompter to inquire after and pursue the rule of right, but only our own self-love, that universal principle of action ... he has not perplexed the law of nature with a multitude of abstracted rules and precepts ... but has graciously reduced the rule of obedience to this one paternal precept ‘that man should pursue his own true and substantial happiness’. This is the foundation of what we call ethics or natural law ... (qtd. in *WJWR* 228-9)

Blackstone is apparently founding his principle of the pursuit of self-love on sound grounds: human nature, God's will, and the law of nature. It is nevertheless too easy to see that these grounds are no more reasonable than the principle they support. According to MacIntyre, Blackstone contends they all embody the same conception, that of the pursuit of love or the self-interest that just happens to be organizing English society of the eighteenth century. The same goes with property; Blackstone, contrary to Stair, bases the individual's public obligations in his or her status in terms of property (*WJWR* 230).

It is worth remembering that emphasizing the tradition-constituted face of intellectual inquiries does not mean dispensing with its tradition-constitutive aspect. Here, I do not mean that intellectual inquiries are inevitably the reflections of the society they conceptualize and describe. The genesis of theorizing in a *tradition of inquiry*, MacIntyre remarks, is at one with the tradition itself (*WJWR* 356). What distinguishes an influential theory is partly its capacity for developing a comprehensive structure in which proposed principles become fundamental by way of their explanatory power in a wide range of areas, not merely by reflecting such structures. Rather, the principles of a tradition to which appeals are made in social as well as intellectual matters are the outcome of interplay between intellectual inquiries conceptualizing social realities, and the social and cultural order presenting the structural relations between them. MacIntyre is arguing that there has not been substantial, as opposed to merely formal, principles of reason which have equally generally secured the allegiance of different societies regardless of the pillars supporting respective social structures. Should his arguments prove valid, the possibility of finding or devising such principles, either actually or theoretically, is denied.

1.2.2 Social and Intellectual Clashes in Heresy Trials

The second area of clashing and competing views of reason which I have chosen from MacIntyre's observations on the Scottish tradition is the heresy trials of the first part of eighteenth century. He draws on five trials of professors of moral philosophy and divinity who were either vindicated or ordered to leave their position. Two competing views of reason and its relation to Christianity clash in these trials. On the one hand, there is the Evangelical Calvinist view in which reason is subordinate to divine revelation. Sometimes, reason is prohibited from being employed not only in Christian theological matters and divine law, but also in characterizing and distinguishing moral vices from virtues. On the other hand, there is the dominant philosophical view of reason which is held to be adequate for discerning the principles of morality in the absence of Christian revelation.

Both views were affected by and suffered from the incongruent understanding of passions and the inner senses which pervades the Scottish tradition. MacIntyre argues that both views failed to adequately respond to the imposition of a passion-centered discourse in their intellectual and social realms. And as such they marked a further state of failure in responding to the two challenges discussed earlier and in adequately defending the Aristotelian pillars of the tradition.¹ This rising passion-centered view was not totally imposed from the outside, though; we can find the roots of this view in the tradition's earlier thinkers' works such as in the Calvinistic theology of Stair.² The already unsteady combination of Calvinism and Aristotelianism on passions and reason was

¹ These two challenges were the encounter of the Scottish tradition with passion-based Anglicized structures of social life and intellectual endeavors and the internal social and political ruptures.

² Despite his Calvinistic views, Stair was highly distinguished from competing views in heresy trials in his particularly Aristotelian account of reason. He was Aristotelian not only in his explicit exposition of reason but in the very task he assumed in uniting morality, natural science and law all under a set of first principles of reason.

exposed to passion-centered forms of Anglicized life and gave birth to two equally unvital sides of the heresy trials. The Evangelical Calvinistic view, MacIntyre notes, opposed not only philosophers such as Locke, Hobbes, and Spinoza but also the Scottish tradition's own intellectual roots in Ancient Greek philosophers like Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle (*WJWR* 244). Its subsequent hinging of epistemology for the most part on the inner sense of faith deprived the proponents of the Evangelical Calvinistic view of the appeal to reason which could have enabled its defense against thoroughly alien and secular appeals to inner senses. When feelings and passions take the principal role in judgments and actions, they may well conduce to heresy rather than to faith in Evangelical Calvinism. The distinguished figure on the philosophical side is Francis Hutcheson around whose philosophy MacIntyre expounds in a separate chapter. Hutcheson rejects an Aristotelian conception of reason as the only legitimate master of passions and instead develops the conception of moral sense as the autonomous determiner of the first principles of morality. We shall see in the next section that MacIntyre views this conceptual innovation only as a transitional state to Hume's thorough rejection of Aristotle.

Both attitudes towards reason have been developed within two powerful institutions in Scottish society of seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, namely the church and the philosophy profession. Evangelicals' ideas had the concrete support of the church and the "unpropertied," and consequently the less educated class of the society (*WJWR* 242). It is nevertheless the institution of professors of philosophy, rather than the church, which has been often ignored in the popular narrations of those heresy trials. To redress this situation, MacIntyre draws our attention to the deep foundations of this institution in the Scottish tradition.

The institution of professors of moral philosophy, MacIntyre argues, is "the most important bearer[s] of a distinctly Scottish intellectual and cultural tradition" (*WJWR* 251). Further, the

Westminster's inspired policy of unifying the curriculum of universities to increase its control over them only led to more autonomous and particularly prestigious professorship positions in society (*WJWR* 237). In seventeenth and eighteenth century Scotland, a professor of moral philosophy was "the official defender of the rational foundations of Christian theology, of Morals, and of law"¹ (*WJWR* 248). This view is perfectly in agreement with the dominant spirit of the works of philosophers at that time; for instance, "Hutcheson's philosophy does not merely include, it is, a rational theology" (*WJWR* 260). Further, according to MacIntyre, Hutcheson "frequently cited scripture as well as reasoning in support of his arguments, and there can be no doubt that he believed in a perfect agreement between scripture, rightly understood, and the conclusions of reason concerning the system of nature, rightly understood" (*WJWR* 261). His principles of morality, nevertheless, were neither dependent on the nature or existence of God nor were they grounded in reason. Rather, he believed that passions were not only the motivating force of action but also the sole criterion for distinguishing virtuous from vicious action. By making this claim, Hutcheson and the institution of philosophy set to compete with the authority of the church not so much by opposing its official doctrine but by claiming validity for its secular standards of justification for action. These secular standards will have contributed to the isolation of Christian thought from intellectual inquiries and ultimately from society.

By explaining clashes between conflicting principles of rationality in the heresy trials, MacIntyre does not intend to depict them as merely intellectual confrontations. Thus, he reminds us that:

¹ In chapters twelve to fifteen of *WJWR*, MacIntyre expounds in detail how academic institutions, especially philosophy, were shaping and certainly shaped by the social and cultural realities of the Scottish tradition. I nevertheless do not get into those details, since it goes beyond the purposes of the present discussion.

Any society in which practical life is both professedly and to some large degree in fact governed by appeal to some set of fundamental principles must possess institutionalized ways in which those who deviate from, rebel against, or put in question those principles are called to account (*WJWR* 241)

In MacIntyre's view, with which I agree, the fact that sometimes those holding courts of heresy had themselves some untenable view of rationality (in reference to their tradition) should not prevent us from realizing the necessity for some sort of institutionalized mechanism for protecting and preserving the principles of the deeply embedded theological life of Scottish tradition (*WJWR* 231).

1.2.3 Hume's Subversion

In MacIntyre's account of the Scottish tradition, Hume concludes the final stage of its crisis with its decisive defeat. Hume took from Hutcheson the crucial idea that practical reason cannot incite action in us and it is only passions that can do so (*WJWR* 285). Passions take a fundamental role in Hume's philosophy, a role which places it in direct opposition not only to Calvinist Aristotelianism of Scotland's seventeenth century but to Aristotle himself (*WJWR* 299).

According to MacIntyre, Hume believed that passions not only move us to act but determine the ends towards which we act. On the other side, practical reason not only does not govern passions, but it cannot even move itself to exercise its *capacities* or initiate an inquiry (*WJWR* 301). Rather, passions move reason to ask and answer three kinds of questions about possible measures towards passion-prescribed ends. First, what is the nature of the object desired or the state wished? Secondly, what sort of means are available? Thirdly, how should passions and their ends be ordered so as to maximize the satisfaction of as many conflicting passions as

possible? (*WJWR* 309) Hume's conception of passions, as MacIntyre explains, is a basic conception which could not be understood in terms of or evaluated by some other concept or criterion. As to their being reasonable, they "neither have nor lack rational warrant, can neither be congruent nor inconsistent with the requirements of reason" (*WJWR* 302). Two fundamental passions, pride and humility, have the self as their intentional object (*WJWR* 292), and moral virtues or vices are defined through the qualities which arouse pride or humility in us or others (*WJWR* 294).

To repeat, MacIntyre observes a substantial connection between the Humean view of passion and its relation to practical reason on the one hand, and the basic social and economic relationships of eighteenth century English society which are informed by the mutual provision of pleasure and protection against pain on the other. He notes that Hume was not only deeply influenced by English intellectuals like Locke, Shaftesbury, Smith, and Hobbes, but also by peculiarly English dialect, culture, manners and attitudes in his personal and intellectual life (*WJWR* see ch. 16). The objects of Hume's basic passion of pride, on which he defines the self and moral virtues, partly reflects this influence:

[The objects of pride are] mental qualities: 'wit, good-sense, learning, courage, justice, integrity', and bodily qualities: 'beauty, strength, agility, good mein, address in dancing, riding, fencing, and ... dexterity in any manual business and manufacture' and also 'our country, family, children, relations, riches, riches, houses, gardens, horses, dogs, clothes ...' (*WJWR* 294)

If such heterogeneous objects arouse conflicting passions, how can practical reason order them when they cannot even be framed in terms of being reasonable or unreasonable? The only way they can be ordered is through a society in which its members have established a practical

consensus on patterns of reciprocal provision of interests and passions. MacIntyre argues that there is no other principle within such a tradition to which reason can turn:

So one reasons and judges in all moral and practical matters as a member both of a particular community and of a type of social order characteristic of all civilized peoples. Withdraw from human beings that reciprocity of shared responses and consequent possibilities of shared reasoning and you withdraw also that type of social order in which the calm passions and the habits of response which express them restrain and overcome the violent passions. (*WJWR* 320-21)

MacIntyre argues that Hume's internally consistent account of practical reason and passions proved superior both to Stair's, a Calvinistic interpretation of Aristotle, and to Hutcheson's, which made reason dependent on moral senses in its moral judgments. But this superiority was also in virtue of what Hume shared with Stair and Hutcheson in the Scottish tradition. One commonality which stands out is their appeal to some first principles, an appeal that was the intellectual characteristic of Scottish tradition. The other commonality is the influence of the canonical work of Cicero, *De Officiis*, which was read, interpreted, and reinterpreted by intellectuals of all views in the Scottish tradition. Yet what they share, MacIntyre would argue, goes far beyond some ideas or texts. They share a tradition which grounds such continuity not only in terms of theoretical conceptions and premises, but in terms of a shared social and cultural framework. Although Hume's account of reason and morality reveals the theoretical inconsistencies of its predecessors and avoids them, it could not prove rationally superior, if it did not share the same Scottish tradition with Hutcheson and Stair.

Since MacIntyre's explanation of Hume's tradition is focused on disagreements and conflicts within it, I would like to emphasize the importance of commonalities of discussed

opposing views for forming one and the same tradition. By such commonalities I do not mean any *prima facie* or impregnable principles or beliefs. In the clashes between different regulating principles of a tradition, there would not be any *inherently* impregnable rule or practice immune from criticism or doubt. But there would definitely be some tenets that the inhabitants of a tradition find almost *no conceivable way to criticize or question without destroying* the tradition itself. What makes questioning or doubting some special principles of a tradition difficult to conceive, rather than others, is the fundamental ways in which appeals are made to them and the extent to which they shape and ground various practices and theoretical systems. As we saw earlier, a theological view of the world was fundamental to both practical aspects of Scottish life, e.g., its legal system, and its intellectual areas such as in Stair's and Hutcheson's accounts of morality and practical reason. Although such theological tenets have not been immune from all doubt or criticism, one could not doubt them without questioning the Scottish tradition itself. And Hume's subversive account of the nature and role of passions and reason in our judgments and actions could not have been so destructive had it not undermined this theological pillars as part of its project. Although MacIntyre's narration of the Scottish tradition is a story of conflicts and disagreements, the point of telling such story is how narrating and understanding it is based on an enduring continuity throughout the tradition. A tradition essentially includes a continuous thread of agreement in practice or belief throughout different stages of progress or decline and/or partial overlaps between succeeding stages. For the Scottish tradition, specific theological beliefs were that continuing thread. But a tradition also has overlapping succeeding modes of reasoning and beliefs. MacIntyre shows such overlaps between Stair and Hutcheson, and Hutcheson and Hume. Both of these two continuities, i.e., a continuous thread of agreement in practice and belief and overlapping succeeding modes of reasoning, give us the only possible standing ground from which rational

evaluation is possible. The commonalities of the Scottish tradition allow us to realize a line of progress in overcoming contradictions and incoherencies from Stair to Hutcheson and then to Hume.

1.3 Practices: Constitutional to Tradition

What I have explained so far about tradition needs an important elaboration. It may seem from what I have said that a tradition consists of competing *principles* which shape various social and intellectual beliefs and practices, and thereby reduce a tradition to a finite set of principles. However, practices themselves constitute primary elements of a tradition and cannot be comprehended or exercised based on any definite set of rules or statements. MacIntyre may talk about the *principles* of Stair's view which characterized and distinguished Scottish law or Evangelical Calvinism's *precepts* which were shaping legal and religious institutions in Scotland. Yet he considers as essential to legal and religious institutions, and thereby to their tradition, the *practices* which inform them. In this regard there is no fundamental difference between the distinctly intellectual practices in philosophy and religious or cultural rituals. Wittgenstein first taught us the essential role of practices and their irreducibility to rules: "Not only rules, but also examples are needed for establishing a practice. Our rules leave loopholes open, and the practice has to speak for itself" (*On Certainty* §139). Standards of property could establish the basic political and social relationships of eighteenth century England only through accepting particular examples of ownership and transaction while repudiating others. In the same way, the principles with which we have been concerned, such as the pursuit of happiness, are in need of particular examples to establish Scottish practices and thereby its tradition. Some particular examples of such practices include making law while being under, or having no, obligations to God, making moral judgments while holding or denying the priority of revelation, and associating and regulating one's

relations with others, working, or raising children as if the passions motivate and show us the final end. In the same fundamental way that principles are in need of such practices, a tradition is dependent on such examples.

Here, I should make an important note of the role of tradition in MacIntyre's overall philosophy. Thus far, the primacy of the concept of tradition and its exemplifications for both illustrating his view of rationality and justifying it in *WJWR* is clear to us. I nevertheless should caution one not to mistake the idea of tradition for a fully-fledged theory similar to, for example, that of Kuhn's paradigms. In order to clarify this caution, I will make a quick reference to MacIntyre's later works in which he is concerned with representing and defending central ideas of *WJWR*. There, he does not give special weight to the conception of tradition and instead uses terms like "system of thought and practice" or "standpoint" or "point of view" (see, for example, MacIntyre, "Incommensurability, Truth, And The Conversation"). MacIntyre is even less concerned with bringing in and further elaborating on the idea of tradition in his other major works which are not as relevant to the themes explored in *WJWR*. I think his reticence partly stems from MacIntyre's consciously avoiding the term 'tradition'. For, it seems, MacIntyre fears that by doing so, he would bring in the same relativistic implications of Kuhn's notion of paradigm and Feyerabend's notion of tradition and thereby inevitably meet his rivals on *their* grounds. This fear seems well-founded when we notice that even with this underdeveloped conception of tradition, he has frequently been accused of and understood as embodying a relativistic theory of rationality and justice. The relativism these philosophers are developing is arising from the deep rational break between different traditions/paradigms. MacIntyre tries to keep some sort of rational rope bridge between traditions, but, as I will discuss at the end of second chapter, he hardly succeeds. In the section 2.6, I will show that his worry over avoiding relativism has prevented him from

organizing and reinforcing his arguments against liberal rationality around the forceful conception of tradition, while failing to help him counter Kuhn's and Feyerabend's argumentative rejection of the possibility of rational debate between rival views.

1.4 Conclusion

I shall conclude this chapter by drawing attention to the significance of what I have expounded so far about Hume's tradition for understanding MacIntyre's view of rationality and justice and for the purposes of my thesis in general. By looking at the particular interactions between various informing factors of Hume's tradition, I hope I have clarified MacIntyre's notion of a tradition of inquiry. I also hope my rather extensive examination of Hume's tradition has shown in exactly which ways MacIntyre takes rationality as being constituted in and constitutive for a tradition of inquiry. MacIntyre incorporates only some of the activities constitutive to reason, a reason which in turn governs such activities: intellectual heritage handed down in the form of canonical texts, modes of argument, and the overarching framework of conceptions and ideas, as well as established social, political and cultural practices and institutions with the attitudes and beliefs on which they are founded and thereby reinforced. A cogent and forceful argument for tradition-constituted and tradition-constitutive rationality is not possible except by looking at related specific and concrete interactions of reason within a specific tradition. I have already mentioned why I chose Hume's tradition to serve as an important illustration. In depicting Hume's tradition, MacIntyre forcefully argues that the conflicts from which Hume emerged as part of the pervasive movement of Enlightenment were far removed from what liberals often see as the problem with the society organized around certain conception of the good. Liberals have attributed the problem to the fact of reasonable pluralism which require the oppressive use of state power to maintain continual adherence to one conception of good. Reasonable pluralism has been taken as

a specific fact about contemporary modern societies, and possibly as an ideal which all societies should strive toward. MacIntyre's historical treatment definitely oppose to assuming that reasonable pluralism is a fact and thus tells a different story about the Scottish tradition. As we will see in the examination of the conception of incommensurability in the next chapter, MacIntyre's historical account is also necessary for challenging the second specific fact of reasonable pluralism. As we have seen in MacIntyre's treatment of the Scottish tradition, Scottish society was actually organized around some theological and Aristotelian views of the good. Realizing this fact enables us to identify successes from failures and understand them. As I have already explained,¹ holding those fundamental views of the good also constituted the ground for what was reasonable and justificatory to hold about reason and justice, not the cause of its failure.

By rejecting the considerations of the good from intellectual and public arenas of the modern societies, MacIntyre rightly points out, liberals have fallen prey to emotivism. Understanding Hume's view of reason and its relation to the passions is particularly important for understanding this well-received, and probably most powerful, criticism of liberalism. I shall commence the next chapter with this objection from MacIntyre.

¹ see the end of the section 1.1

2. MacIntyre's Criticism of Liberalism

Alasdair MacIntyre approaches the project of explaining and justifying tradition-constituted rationality from two main ways. The first is largely explaining tradition-constituted rationality through narration of some major intellectual and, especially, philosophical developments, interwoven with particular social, cultural and political practices which together give expression to a tradition-specific rationality. A portion of this narration was discussed in the last chapter. The second approach is characterizing the relation between various rationalities embodied by distinct traditions. According to MacIntyre, traditions can be as much alike as they are different, but some traditions might be so different from each other that their comparison is rationally impossible. The possibility of a relationship of incommensurability between traditions is already implicit in a tradition-constituted account of rationality; but, in this chapter, I shall explain and defend MacIntyre's arguments for the incommensurability between traditions, and show how Thomism and liberalism are in such a relation.

In this chapter, I shall start expounding MacIntyre's account of incommensurable rationalities by noting his criticisms of liberal rationality and its manifestations in morality and justice. According to MacIntyre, the liberal project of rejecting considerations of the human good from the rational justification of public actions and affairs has rendered morality indeterminate and degraded justice to regulative rules for maximum possible equal satisfaction of individuals' interests. I will explain three kinds of criticisms MacIntyre makes of liberalism and then explain and respond to three kinds of objections that could be made against these MacIntyrean criticisms of liberalism. Responding to the objections will provide us with an occasion for deeper understanding of incommensurability of traditions.

One of the most crucial objections to MacIntyre that I will discuss is that his criticisms of liberalism are only partially developed; they have already assumed Thomism. I shall argue that such circularity, indeed, exists, but, it coheres with, and presumably originated from, MacIntyre's more general, and arguably true, view that each of two alien traditions always assumes its own principles in critically assessing the other, i.e., alien traditions are rationally closed systems. By placing MacIntyre's criticisms of liberal rationality in his account of rationality of traditions, we can identify the conflict between MacIntyre and liberalism at a higher level, i.e., meta-philosophical level. One might well suggest, the real point of disagreement between two contesting views is not their opposing identification of rational principles and the relation of these principles to the human good in defining morality and justice, rather, the nature and limitations of rational comprehension and justification of such principles and relations. Yet, I shall contend that as long as one seeks to be impartial in evaluation of MacIntyre's and liberalism's views, one will find MacIntyre's meta-philosophical view of incommensurable tradition-constituted rationalities as much rationally incompatible with a Rawlsian meta-philosophical conviction of cross-traditional reasoning as MacIntyre's Thomistic account of reason and human good is incommensurable with Rawls's liberal view of rationality as characteristic of autonomous individuals. This reading of MacIntyre's account of reasoning and justification entails relativism. I shall show at the end of this chapter that MacIntyre's attempts to circumvent relativism fail. Relativism is the inevitable outcome of the tradition-constituted nature of rationality.

2.1 MacIntyre's Criticism of the Liberal Treatment of the Good

In *After Virtue*, MacIntyre develops a rather extensive criticism of the moral status of contemporary modern societies which he loosely takes as all having liberal values and beliefs. By dismissing the collaborative inquiry into the good of humans, MacIntyre argues, liberalism has

fragmented the morality in society into incomprehensible piecemeal rules and rendered barren intellectual inquiries into the determination of their meaning (see MacIntyre, “The Privatization of Good”). In MacIntyre’s view, any consistent following of moral rules needs a paradigm established through the practices of community members who strive for a better understanding of their common good and ways of achieving it. Unfortunately, liberalism has rejected any institutional and socially established inquiry into the human good.

Liberals, MacIntyre argues, have separated two areas of inquiry. First, inquiries into the good human life, although rational, constitute an arena of ineradicable disagreements; inquiry into this area must therefore be left to individuals and prevented from entering public discourse. Second, inquiries into moral rules that, on the contrary, can be rationally concluded; inquiry into such rules can define and found a moral, and possibly just, society. What is supposed to determine the moral rules in the absence of a common understanding of the good is a shared and neutral reason. Because such reason is deemed to secure the agreement of those with different and contradicting conceptions of the good, its precepts need to be uncontroversial or at least conclusively determinable in respect to moral rules.

Firstly, MacIntyre objects to the reason produced for separating these two areas, namely, the impossibility of a rational agreement on a definite conception of the human good that can shape a just social and political order. He contends that this reason ignores, or rather distorts, both historical and contemporary realities. The organization of non-modern ancient or medieval communities around one specific understanding of the good life has often been depicted by liberals as an imposition of one specific person’s or group of people’s understanding of the good on an entire society. While examining the Scottish tradition in the last chapter, I mentioned an instance of such self-assuming diagnosis of the roots of the Aristotelian world’s conflicts (sec. 1.1).

Secondly, MacIntyre contends that the prolonged endeavors of philosophers of the Enlightenment movement, such as Hume, Kant, and Mill and their liberal predecessors, have shown only the persistent failure of articulating such impartial reason. This impartial reason must be capable of determining moral rules and securing the allegiance of all rational persons, yet remain detached from any conception of the good. It has proved impossible to conceive precepts of practical rationality separate from the practices of a community and the good for which they aim. Indeed, the consequences of the liberal enterprise have been beyond the failure of a philosophical project.

MacIntyre argues that liberalism, by banishing discussions of the human good from the public discourse, on the one hand, and by failing to deliver on its promises to develop, theoretically and practically, rationally settled moral rules, on the other, have affected both the public and private life of Western liberal societies. The liberal denial of the possibility of a common understanding of the good has affected moral apprehension; what individuals once shared as moral oughts and ought nots have lost both their boundaries and justification in society. Moreover, people's appeals to incompatible moral principles, often a popularized version of their philosophical counterpart, are incapable of being reconciled with, and understood in terms of a rationally determined and justified set of moral rules that could ensure the integrity of a society. Liberalism has rendered void both the rational agreement on moral standards and, consequently, the moral evaluation of public actions. MacIntyre notes that this state of fundamental indefiniteness has led, more often than not, to people accepting, either explicitly or implicitly, that moral statements and arguments are nothing more than a means of expressing personal attitudes and feelings of like or dislike towards specific actions (*After Virtue* 18). Emotivists have truly captured the prevailing assumptions about the moral justification of actions in our time. After all, MacIntyre notes, adoption of any of the various

moral principles, be it the principle of universalizability, utility, or intuitiveness, has itself been left to personal preferences (*After Virtue* 20).

To illustrate such a nebulous state of morality in liberal societies, MacIntyre draws our attention to the status of discussions about different moral issues. For example, in his paper “Privatization of Good,” he examines the prohibition against lying. Although all are *taught* that lying is wrong, it is nevertheless far from clear what counts as lying in various circumstances, what the exceptions (if any) are, what the sanctions for lying ought to be, and how we should treat a liar (*After Virtue* 249-251). Such indeterminacy has undermined people’s capacity to evaluate the moral worth of actions and thereby act in a morally consistent manner; they swing blindly between available, though incompatible, moral principles in their judgments and actions.

Social justice is the other area which, according to MacIntyre, is deeply affected by the liberal conception of the good. From a liberal view, social justice should be primarily and solely concerned with instrumental, rather than human good; supposedly, everyone would agree about the nature and priority of instrumental goods. According to MacIntyre, this emphasis, nevertheless, brings about a peculiar attitude towards justice. Justice becomes primarily about negotiating fair terms in a social contract that determines the share accruing to each individual of those instrumental goods defined by liberalism as indispensable. Thus, according to MacIntyre, liberalism is a tradition, though not, nor capable of being, a tradition of inquiry, which has layered dealings with the good on different levels. On the level of public or philosophical discussions of the good, debates are always doomed to be interminable; arguments for different conceptions of the good life are taken to be, although rational, equally indecisive (*WJWR* 343). No rival argument for or claim to the human good can possibly be advanced beyond expressions of preferences (*Ibid.*).

At a higher social and political level though, the order of society is maintained and justified by making maximum equal pursuit of personal goods an indubitable principle.

MacIntyre argues that prioritizing the maximum pursuit of individuals' goods, deemed as the only practicable way of organizing a fair society, has undermined the *rational grounds* on which justice may receive its due status. MacIntyre argues that the precedence given to the pursuit of personal goods does not primarily require us to observe justice unless it somehow supports such a pursuit. In other words, "no disposition to care for justice as such will be first required in order to be rational" (*WJWR* 343). The very "need for some conception of justice is in this liberal culture no more and no less than the need for some set of regulating principles by which cooperation in the implementation of preferences may be so far as possible achieved and decisions made as to which kind of preference have priority over others" (*WJWR* 342).

An essential aspect of implementation of preferences is developing bureaucratic and managerial expertise, integral to any stable modern society, for predicting and manipulating its members (*The MacIntyre Reader* 5). Yet opposing views clash in society; where they do, courts of justice are not adjudicating based on any shared conception of morality because "[o]ur society as a whole has none" (*After Virtue* 236). Rather, they "play a role of peacemaking or truce-keeping body by negotiating its way through an impasse of conflict" (*Ibid.*).

As in moral spheres of liberal societies, the consequences of omitting considerations about the individuals' overall good in justice is not confined to public arenas; MacIntyre argues that it also permeates one's private attitudes and perspective of goods. In fact, by rejecting any single overall good in the public realm, MacIntyre argues, liberal philosophers such as Rawls are "compartmentalizing" various spheres not only in society, but also in the self, with each sphere having a different and probably incompatible good among which individuals pursue their

preferences according to the rules of bargaining (*WJWR* 337). He cites one of Rawls's passages in this regard: "Human good is heterogeneous because the aims of the self are heterogeneous. Although to subordinate all our aims to one end does not strictly speaking violate the aims of the principles of rational choice ... it still strikes us as irrational or more likely as mad. The self is disfigured ..." (Ibid.). MacIntyre concludes,

the liberal self is one that moves from sphere to sphere, compartmentalizing its attitudes. The claims of any one sphere to attention or to resources are once again to be determined by the summing of individual preferences and by bargaining. So it is important for all areas of human life and not for explicitly political and economic transactions that there should be accepted rules of bargaining. (Ibid.)

2.2 MacIntyre's Criticism of Liberalism's Claims to Neutrality and Objectivity

MacIntyre's second criticism of liberal rationality and justice is centered around its claimed neutrality and objectivity. Questioning liberalism's claims to neutrality in defining a just society, MacIntyre notes some of the presuppositions of liberalism's regulative approach to justice about the human nature and its relation to society. One manifestation of this approach is contractual theories of justice. It is not accidental that contractual avenues to justice have been repeatedly proposed and articulated by liberal philosophers; such a method fits the deemed nature of the members of a society and their relationships. A social contract, MacIntyre remarks, is designed to bridge the gap between individuals with prior "private and competing interests" (*After Virtue* 233). It is "as though we have been shipwrecked on an uninhabited island with a group of other individuals, each of whom is a stranger to me and to all the others" (Ibid.). Each of these

individuals is asking, “what kind of social contract with others is it reasonable for me to enter to?” (Ibid.) Such a model excludes “any account of human community in which the notion of desert in relation to contributions to the common tasks of that community in pursuing shared goods could provide basis for judgments about virtue and injustice” (Ibid.).

Liberalism’s outlook on humans and society has also informed its characterization of reason. To illustrate this concretely, MacIntyre notices how Rawls characterizes neutral rationality in his theory of justice with specifications of a liberal society. Rawls envisages the “initial situation,” as in his succeeding reformulation of it, the original position, as impartial “as to different and rival conceptions and advocacies of the good for men” (“Justice: A New Theory” 332). MacIntyre notes that Rawls permits particular primary goods and religious and moral beliefs into the initial position. He asks,

Who are then these agents in the initial situation, who want more money and more talent, who make rational life plans, who belong to a society of religious disagreement and moral pluralism and are happy to do so, who see a shared standard of perfection as a threat to liberty? They are certainly not Benedictine monks in the Middle Ages, or inhabitants of Ireland in 1600 or of Massachusetts in 1650. [...] The initial situation is biased towards one kind of social reality. (Ibid.)

Yet, tailored as it is for a particularly liberal society, Rawls’s theory of justice is not formulating *the* rational principles of justice for such a society, MacIntyre notes in *After Virtue*. “Equality with respect to needs,” in Rawls’s theory of justice, seems insolvably opposed to Nozick’s principle of legitimate entitlement to one’s possessions (*After Virtue* 231). MacIntyre argues that Rawls not only appeals to a reason which assumes a certain primacy as to the needs of

the members of society, but he does so in a way that precludes any further grounds to which appeals could be made in evaluations and comparisons with other liberal theories such as Nozick's:

If Rawls were to argue that anyone behind the veil of ignorance, who knew neither whether and how his needs would be met nor what his entitlements would be, ought rationally to prefer a principle which respects needs to one which respects entitlements, invoking perhaps principles of rational decision theory to do so, the immediate answer must be not only that we are never behind such of veil of ignorance, but also that this leaves unimpugned Nozick's premise about inalienable rights. (*After Virtue* 231-32)

Thus, MacIntyre holds that not only liberalism, like all other traditions, is held together by some fundamental principles which cannot be further grounded, but that there are some principles to which liberal philosophers appeal that are not fundamental to the liberal tradition, yet, cannot be rationally vindicated. Rawls's already liberally reasonable principles are essentially incapable of either vindicating themselves or impugning other principles of justice with which they otherwise share some fundamental grounds of liberal tradition such as equality and liberty. In fact, by so objecting MacIntyre is attempting to push the conception of reason at work in Rawls's theory not only into the boundaries of the social and cultural particularities of liberalism, but to such an arbitrary and detached ground that it would effectively fail to function as a reason.

In his earlier criticism, MacIntyre points out that Rawls's principles of reason could be formulated and employed only within the structure of a tradition which shapes the presuppositions and interests of the participants of the original position. Therefore, insofar as Rawls concedes the arguments and results of his theory are informed within an overall dynamic of thought and practice, i.e. tradition, that I examined in the last chapter, there should not be any objection directed to his theory in this regard. In fact, in *WJWR*, MacIntyre notices that Rawls, among other liberal writers,

have recognized that “their theory and practice are after all that of one more contingently grounded and founded tradition, in conflict with other rival traditions as such and like certain other traditions in claiming a right to universal allegiance, but unable to escape from the condition of a tradition” (346). But I will argue that, by this remark, MacIntyre is not attributing the conception of *tradition of inquiry* that he develops in *WJWR* to liberalism (for an explanation of the difference between tradition and a tradition of inquiry see my Introduction). Later on in this chapter, I will see such an acknowledgment on the part of liberal philosophers has often amounted to appeals to principles of coherency in structuring and elaborating the convictions of liberal tradition; as we see in the discussion of incommensurability, MacIntyre’s conception of tradition of inquiry is remote from the kind of tradition of which liberal philosophers think themselves a part. Liberals might acknowledge that their views are not intrinsically valid for all rational humans, but they see their liberal principles as constituted by neither a tradition nor a tradition of inquiry.

2.3 MacIntyre’s Criticism as to Desert/Entitlement

MacIntyre’s third criticism is specifically directed at Rawls’s theory of justice. According to MacIntyre, Rawls fails to acknowledge the notion of desert in his theory of justice. Although current deep divisions about a just society are, for the most part, influenced by the liberal framework in which the very possibility of reaching one, rationally conclusive understanding of the human good is denied, the social realities of current modern societies are not devoid of appeals to the human good. Specifically, one might want to compare the commonality of considerations of individuals’ moral worth, i.e., desert in appeals to justice with the liberal precept of priority of the pursuit of individual goods which MacIntyre objects to strongly. It should be borne in mind that MacIntyre does not deny that by centralizing individuals’ goods in Rawls’s theory, he is reflecting a “shared view” of the members of a modern society (*After Virtue* 233). Nor does MacIntyre deny

that a *coherent* inclusion of a shared view of the primacy of the pursuit of personal goods into a conception of justice entails rejection of moral excellences as its basis. Indeed, MacIntyre affirms both that the question Rawls is addressing is an issue in modern society and that in answering this question one inevitably excludes considerations of desert. One encounters a rather intractable difficulty if one tries to include appeals both to the private and competing interests of individuals and to desert in the conception of justice. The problem MacIntyre notices is that if we are willing to accept as a crucial merit a theory's ability to reflect social realities, then Rawls's theory has succeeded in consistently reflecting some realities only at the expense of ignoring the constant appeals of the very same society's members to desert on the issues of *the public interest* (*After Virtue* 232, also look at 234). Although it is incoherent, such societies, when appealing to justice, invoke both each persons' individual interests and what such a person deserves in the light of his or her moral excellences. Thus, we should consider the "intractable difficulty" of appealing to both the private and competing interests of individuals and what they actually deserve as the true difficulty of liberal societies. This state of appealing to incompatible principles of justice is one more symptom of a rationally fragmented society whose indeterminacy of moral rules we were concerned with earlier. Here, MacIntyre's treatment of liberalism has a specifically social dimension; Rawls has simply overlooked the contradictory appeals to justice and grounded his conception of justice on individuals' private interests rather than desert.

When we compare this critique laid out in *After Virtue* with the kind of concern MacIntyre raises earlier about the omission of desert in his review of Rawls's *A Theory of Justice*, it becomes clear that, over time, MacIntyre has distinguished his treatment of Rawls from similar ideas advanced from a liberal ground. In that review, MacIntyre objects to Rawls's indiscriminate

treatment of the naturally or cultivated talented and untalented of society as a consequence of dismissing desert from justice. (“Justice: A New Theory” 333)

Before examining some of the objections made against MacIntyre’s criticisms, it is worth noting how MacIntyre’s criticism of Rawls is gradually overshadowed by his criticisms of liberalism over the course of the three works I mentioned. MacIntyre moves from an explicit acknowledgment of the specific themes of Rawls’s conception of justice in his book review of 1974 to a more general treatment in which Rawls’s theory of justice is one more articulation of the principles of liberalism—rather than propounding a particular socialistic version of liberal justice—which from the view of *After Virtue* is as untenable as Nozick’s theory. From this general treatment he then moves to almost ignoring Rawls in favor of criticizing liberalism itself in *WJWR*. This shows that over time, MacIntyre has worked out his opposition to liberalism; he starts by criticizing particular liberal principles and theories, but then recognizes that it is liberalism as a whole system, namely, a tradition, that is problematic.

2.4 Objections to MacIntyre’s Criticisms of liberalism

Here, I shall consider three objections that might be raised against MacIntyre’s criticisms of liberalism. The first involves MacIntyre’s treatment of liberal philosophers, especially Rawls whose conception of justice and rationality comes up in MacIntyre’s discussions time and again. Kristin Shrader-Frechette, for instance, objects that MacIntyre never addresses Rawls’s moral–constructivist position; by following Rawls’s arguments “step–by–step,” one may find grounds for agreeing with his principles. Instead, MacIntyre thoughtlessly dismisses Rawls’s theory based on charges of deriving it from “a few particular principles” (“Natural Rights and Human Vulnerability” 107).

Secondly, it might be objected that MacIntyre misrepresents the status of morality and rationality within the tradition of liberalism by overstating practical discrepancies between the members of a liberal society, which is itself, according to MacIntyre, a reflection of intrinsic theoretical disagreements between liberal intellectuals. We should note that MacIntyre's discussion of the incompatibility of Rawls's principle of the equality of needs with Nozick's principle of entitlement is referring to the same fundamental divisions in defining justice as the insoluble theoretical as well as practical discrepancies in liberal morality that I discussed earlier in this chapter. MacIntyre contends that liberal thinkers' fundamental disagreements over morality and justice, which have led to similar discords among members of liberal societies, is the result of a rational fragmentation. Liberalism is incapable of developing and sustaining *rational progress* in defining boundaries, issues, and principles of morality and justice, a highly controversial and destructive claim. According to MacIntyre, instead of "providing grounds for conviction on matters of any substance," liberal philosophers have only succeeded at "clarifying issues and alternatives" (*WJWR* 335).

None of MacIntyre's claims about the fundamental theoretical and consequently practical disagreements in liberalism, the objection might go, are illustrated by close examination of at least some major debates in liberalism, nor does MacIntyre distinguish disagreements in liberal debates from those of other traditions. How could we know that the disagreements between Thomistic scholars, for instance, are not equally, or even more grave? Stephan Mulhall infers that MacIntyre's criticism of liberalism is based on a very limited account of rationality in which rational progress in a debate is characterized by eventual agreement of contesting parties on the same conclusions rather than a shared process of reasoning ("Liberalism, Morality, and Rationality" 217).

Third, MacIntyre's criticism of liberalism seems to be question-begging. MacIntyre contends that dismissing collective endeavors into the human good from public discourse has led liberalism to fail to adequately define the rules of moral conduct. Yet, it turns out that the characterization of such failure is not independent of MacIntyre's view of morality in which moral rules must be essentially grounded on a particular conception of human good. Thus, criticism of the failure of liberalism to adequately define the moral rules assumes MacIntyre's counter-liberal account of moral rules. The same goes with MacIntyre's criticism of the liberal approach to justice. According to MacIntyre, in the absence of a common understanding of the human good, justice is reduced to the regulative rules for realizing maximum possible satisfaction of often conflicting preferences. But only insofar as justice is presumed to be concerned with everyone taking the place one deserves in the society will the defining of justice as the regulative rules of individuals' preferences be genuinely problematic. MacIntyre's both criticisms of the state of morality and justice in liberalism are already assuming a Thomistic approach.

2.5 Defending MacIntyre Against Objections

Despite their different scopes and articulations, the first and second objections are based on the same model of rational justification which is at odds with MacIntyre's view of rationality, and as such, rejects it. Thus, I shall respond to the first two objections by examining the viability of their implicit picture of justification. Then, I come back to the third objection of MacIntyre's theory begging the question.

In the first objection, Shrader-Frechette is drawing on the view that rational justification or refutation of any assertion is primarily procedural. Such procedures should be articulated and communicated independently from the origins from which the assertion arises or the perspectives from which the procedure is perceived. Rawls's veil of ignorance, Shrader-Frechette might

suggest, has successfully constructed such a process in which competing parties behind the veil concur on Rawls's proposed principles independently of the liberal origin and articulation of principles; on the contrary, MacIntyre's attack on Rawls's principle of equality of needs—as well as principle of equal liberties which I did not mention here—fails to address the proposed steps for their justification.

In the second objection, concerns were raised over MacIntyre's assertion that divisions in liberalism are fundamentally different from those in other traditions, in a way that has rendered rational justification and so rational progress impossible. These assertions of MacIntyre, although crucial to the rest of his attacks on the state of morality and justice in liberalism, are unjustified. MacIntyre's narration of the traditions of inquiry, which we were concerned with in the first chapter, presents a powerful illustration and understanding of the nature of rational justification. But such understanding would not by itself explain why the liberal approach to rational justification is essentially deficient. In a moment, I shall propound the way MacIntyre could support the criticism of fragmentation of rationality in liberalism in a way that is consistent with his insight into the tradition-dependent nature of rationality.

The second objection concludes with Mulhall's charges of the narrowness of MacIntyre's account of rationality; it goes along the same lines as Shrader-Frechette. What constitutes the rationality of a dialogue or an argument in both Mulhall's and Shrader-Frechette's view is that all "rational" parties would concur on the process of justification in which conclusions are drawn from premises, but not necessarily result in the eventual agreement of contesting parties. Such a view of rationality, I shall contend, can be best understood as rooted in a specific perception of scientific inquiry in which scientific method realizes *the objective process of reasoning and justification*.

There has been a pervasive movement in various modern intellectual spheres to emulate scientific rationality by identifying and reproducing the same methods and procedures that scientists developed during the scientific revolution. Rawls' conception of a veil of ignorance, which he characterizes as a 'thought experiment', is one such example. However, earnest endeavors by philosophers of science to specify scientific rationality, especially in the second half of the twentieth century, have undermined common, though crucial, perceptions about the scientific method including its centrality, objectivity, and procedural nature. I would argue that both Shrader-Frechette and Mulhall are also appealing to such characteristics when questioning the justification of MacIntyre's arguments against Rawls and liberalism. Kuhn's influential conception of scientific paradigms, however, presents us with a totally different picture of the rationality that guides scientific activities. In Kuhn's view, scientific inquiries are holistic systems of practice which have undertaken historical transformations that have rendered them incommensurable. The details of 1919's eclipse observation could not prove the theory of general relativity for someone who was living in a Newtonian world; on the same grounds, Rawls's step-by-step argumentation for his principles of justice do not rationally challenge those who have not already given their allegiance to the principles of liberalism.

MacIntyre's account of tradition-dependent rationality already includes the scientific enterprise in the overall system of thought and practice of a tradition. But such inclusion is often limited to brief connections between a tradition's current scientific theories and its dominant convictions, and does not receive the elaborate examination he gives to spheres of morality and justice. Presumably, having Kuhn's masterpiece *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* at hand he barely needed to do so. Kuhn's conception of scientific paradigms had already characterized the communal nature of justification and reasoning in science before MacIntyre introduced the

conception of traditions. Exposing the illusory model of scientific rationality that liberalism has constructed, striven for, and represented itself in terms of, would also corroborate MacIntyre's contention that has been challenged in the second objection, i.e., rational debates in both liberal theory and liberal society, are in a fundamental state of fragmentation. By drawing upon Kuhn's historical examination of scientific paradigms, MacIntyre can reinforce his contention that liberal philosophers' endeavors to reveal an objective aspect in a pseudo-scientific procedure or standard of justification, detached from individual and social ties of involved participants has only led to irradicable divisions within liberalism; liberalism's understanding of an objective science is self-projected. In fact, MacIntyre could reinforce his contention by consolidating two arguments: not only has attaining some tradition-independent rationality been historically unsuccessful, but the model liberals have envisaged for such rationality is itself chimerical.

2.6 Incommensurability: Kuhn

Although Kuhn does not use the locution 'rationality', he forcefully and vividly works the various intellectual aspects of modern scientific enterprises into successive incommensurable paradigms. The incommensurability between succeeding paradigms involves more than the problems each paradigm sets out to solve or the associated conceptions and theories which develop to their solution. Kuhn notes that what scientists observe in the scholastic paradigm of physics, which thereby becomes the subject matter of what we normally identify as practices of a rigorous scientific inquiry, is distinct from and incompatible with those in the Newtonian paradigm:

Practicing in different worlds, the two groups of scientists see different things when they look from the same point in the same direction. Again, that is not to say that they can see anything they please. Both are looking at the world, and what they look at has

not changed. But in some areas they see different things, and they see them in different relations one to the other. (Kuhn 150)

In this image of scientific facts, the correspondence between facts and theories is bound to the paradigm in which the observation is made. Kuhn's view also demolishes the common perception of science as continuous and infinite progresses. Scientific progress definitely occurs within a paradigm, but transitions between paradigms are neither progress nor regression; rather, they can be best understood as revolution. These often revolutionary transitions are not led by the steps of decisive neutral experiments designed by ingenious minds. They are, rather, perceptual and conceptual gestalt¹ shifts between incompatible world views (Ibid.) Note that no such transformation or gestalt can be *necessitated* by some preceded crisis (look for a comparison at sec. 1.1). Thus, according to Kuhn, it is not the proof of the new paradigm nor the error of the older paradigm which is at stake in these transformations, because there can be none of them (Kuhn 151). After conversion to a new paradigm though, and from the standpoint of the converts, this mental and perceptual transformation is indiscernible simply because there is no higher basis that could reveal the two incommensurable perceptions as different conceptual variants of the same thing (Ibid. 114). Hence, from the perspective of the convert, what has been held in a previous paradigm was simply and necessarily false (Ibid. 115).

What we once assumed was the continuous and endless progress of science, purportedly as a result of objective experimental procedures designed to objectively confront hypotheses with

¹ Kuhn borrows the conception of gestalt from psychology. To illustrate the idea of gestalt, he uses the famous example of duck-rabbit.

scientific “facts,” has turned out to be the successful resolution of increasingly complicated puzzles within paradigms each of which embody incommensurable views of the world. No scientific process or method can be devised or performed without having a delineation of the phenomenon expected to be seen, and this involves a specific view of the natural world and its entities which a community of scientists share. I suggest that Rawls, Mulhall, or Shrader–Frechette cannot develop or defend an objective process of justification, independent of social and cultural ties of those involved, if this were not possible in science. Because developing this contention further goes beyond the scope of my thesis, I will not comment on this matter further here. Nonetheless, I think there is much that MacIntyre could take from Kuhn’s insightful exploration of scientific inquiry which could enrich his critique of liberal rationality. MacIntyre, however, has some reservations that I will explain at the end of this chapter.

There is one crucial difference between conceptions of scientific paradigms and intellectual traditions of inquiry. Succeeding scientific paradigms cannot coexist in stability; Newtonian physics has replaced Aristotelian physics, but MacIntyre’s traditions may coexist and have done so from the time liberalism has become dominant. Presumably, MacIntyre’s reason for the fundamental disagreement between competing theories of morality and justice which as such has rendered the rational progress impossible within liberalism mirrors why scientific theories advanced from succeeding scientific paradigms cannot enter a rational debate. By so arguing, MacIntyre’s tradition–constituted account of rationality would not only counter liberalism’s historical evidence for reasonable pluralism which is at the heart of liberal rationality as I discussed in the last chapter, but also shows the very contradictory nature of liberal rationality. Although this analogy between incommensurable scientific paradigms on one hand and incompatible traditions of inquiries on the other corroborates MacIntyre’s criticism of liberal rationality he would resist

making it. For MacIntyre believes his conception of tradition, although drawing on Kuhn's insightful idea of incommensurability, can, at the same time, avoid its relativistic implications. Towards the end of this chapter, I will show that MacIntyre's attempts to avoid such relativistic implications are flimsy and contradictory. For now, I will explain how MacIntyre's tradition-dependent rationality can be coherently read and defended.

The analogy I just mentioned brings to the fore a controversial difficulty involved in any local, including tradition-constituted, understanding of rationality. If arguments advanced from incompatible traditions in liberalism cannot enter into a rational debate, how should we understand MacIntyre's criticism of the liberal state of morality and justice, itself advanced from within a Thomistic tradition?

Responding to this concern should also shed light on the third objection I mentioned earlier, i.e., circularity of MacIntyre's criticisms. It seems that the circularity of MacIntyre's criticisms of liberalism is predicated on his view of the impossibility of rational criticism or assessment of alien traditions from the standpoint of the other. Thus, if MacIntyre can prove against liberals that rational understanding and justification is tradition-dependent (or in Kuhn's terms scientific inquiries are paradigmatic), he has also shown why his evaluation and criticism of liberalism could not help but presuppose the tenets of Thomism. So, one might distinguish MacIntyre's confrontation with liberalism on two levels: his claims made from philosophical tradition of Thomism, and his meta-philosophical claims about traditions and rationality itself. We shall see, though, that MacIntyre's meta-philosophical theory of the incommensurability of traditions cannot be *proved against* the liberal principle of the universality of understanding and justification. In the next section, I shall examine what incommensurability entails for rational communication and why, as a meta-philosophical claim, it cannot be proved, nor be refuted by, liberalism. Then, I return to

the objection of the circularity of MacIntyre's criticism of liberalism and argue that such circularity is the consequence of the incommensurability of liberalism and Thomism.

2.7 Implications of Incommensurability for Rational Interactions

Before examining MacIntyre's conception of incommensurability in his overall account of rationality and its entailments, I shall quickly sketch the account we have seen thus far. In the first chapter, we saw MacIntyre's narration of the Scottish tradition. The transformative influence of an increasingly Anglicized social and cultural manners and modes of practice, an influence of which Hume's passion-centered reason was a sophisticated expression, conduced to rejecting Aristotelian forms of reasoning from practical and intellectual life. Based on this and similar trends of intellectual–practice interdependences, MacIntyre suggests that the rationality that governs our various social, cultural, and intellectual practices is *always* bound to the particularities of the tradition in which it is exercised. In fact, both MacIntyre and Kuhn draw on historical resources to show that human rationality has often been embodied in incompatible conceptual schemes and ways of reasoning. We should take care to distinguish this claim from the generally accepted contention that the social and conventional context in which thinkers develop their theories remarkably shapes their problems and approaches. MacIntyre definitely affirms this claim, but disagrees with the view that one can transcend the rationality so characterized beyond its tradition and the particular principles, procedures, questions or practices exemplifying it in order to access an independent and universal rationality. MacIntyre demonstrates his view of rationality by drawing our attention to another recent trend in intellectual inquiries, i.e., that of the Enlightenment. As we saw in the first section of this chapter, he argues that post–Enlightenment philosophers who attempted to reveal some such universal *principles of comprehension and justification*, on one hand, have ended up in a state of fundamental disagreement within the social and cultural tradition

of liberalism. On the other hand, unable to explain various modes of practice and life without liberalism, they have wound up denying the very rationality of other traditions. This is not to assert that people inhabiting different traditions share absolutely nothing; rather, what we all share as rational standards, basic human capabilities and needs are so flimsy that they have proved compatible with too many traditions (“Incommensurability, Truth, And The Conversation” 105).

This view of rationality indicates that in the face of other traditions, we inevitably resort to the rational standards and most certain convictions of *our* tradition in order to evaluate, adjudicate, and—prior to all these—comprehend and explain other traditions. However, since their practices and convictions are often incompatible with ours, such assessment often entails the rejection of the alien tradition. Debates for clarifying and measuring rival traditions, practices and principles often end with emphatic restatement of one’s own certain standards of rationality and “obvious” facts. Presumably, Wittgenstein is also suggesting a similar discontinuity in rational standards held not only in different times but also by contemporaries when he says,

But what men consider reasonable or unreasonable alters. At certain periods men find reasonable what at other periods they found unreasonable. And vice versa.

But is there no objective character here?

Very intelligent and well educated people believe in the story of creation in the Bible, while others hold it as proven false. And the grounds of the latter are well known to the former. (*On Certainty* §336)

Contrary to this view of Wittgenstein is that of liberalism. Liberals hold that humans can be characterized by rational and moral powers, the exercise of which yield precepts minimal

enough to be shared by all humans yet substantial enough to be deployed for neutral comprehension and rational assessment of competing theories, practices or facts. In this view, the radical rational division between competing systems of thought, embedded in MacIntyre's conception of tradition, is unfounded. Any intellectual theory, social or cultural practice, no matter how remote from ours, if rational at all, is comprehensible and thereby subject to our explanation, evaluation, and sometimes our demand for correction. In the *Law of Peoples*, Rawls demands non-liberal societies' compliance with some basic and indispensable principles of liberalism in order to take them into account in his theory of justice.

The opening question of my thesis asks for the proper way of approaching these competing views of rationality and weighing their arguments. Here, I contend that a disinterested comparison of these views is not possible; any evaluation has to be issued from within a tradition. Although MacIntyre's and Rawls's accounts of rationality are the subject matter of our examination and adjudication, at the same time they are claimants to rationality which is the sole authority for adjudicating any, and just such, contest. Presumably, whatever relevant criteria we bring to this assessment, if able to adjudicate between these rivals, would be as substantial and so as much entangled in similar circularity. All historical or social facts—such as those appealed to by Kuhn and MacIntyre in articulating their accounts of rationality—selected for explanation by a rival view, are nonetheless solely from a particular worldview; all evaluative procedures, formulated to be undertaken, would in the entirety of a specific system of thought and practice be given probative status. MacIntyre rightly points out such circularity to support the view of a rational break down between traditions, and here I am noting the same difficulty between his account of tradition-informed rationality and liberalism's universal rationality (“The Privatization of Good” 348).

Tradition-dependent rationality has initially been motivated by questioning the viability of the Enlightenment's project of elaborating value-free principles of rational justification. Yet, MacIntyre admits that from his alternative account of rationality, it is impossible to *prove* that the project of revealing or devising some universal principles or ways of indicating universal justification is barren. Thus, it might be concluded that MacIntyre's position is rationally inconsistent; he invokes historical and empirical grounds to show that his rival's project is deficient but is then unable to prove the rational superiority of his alternative account. We can only understand this seemingly contradictory position by distinguishing the perspectives of the two traditions involved. When MacIntyre argues against liberalism, as a tradition, by showing that it fails in delivering its promises of articulating objective standards of justification and thereby ends in the indeterminacy of moral rules and the sterility of rational discussions, he can only *urge* liberals to consider an alternative system of thought and practice. No tradition can be *refuted* by invoking objective or neutral reasons; rational criticism and refutation are themselves based on the secure grounds provided by a tradition. To illustrate this, we might note what invoking reasons against the universality of rational justification entails. Does not any attempt for such argumentation, after all, appeal to some form of impersonal standard in order to form a counterargument and thereby concede the very same assertions it intended to refute? Such a state of exhaustion of reasons might evoke Wittgenstein's observation that, "To be sure there is justification; but justification comes to an end" (*On Certainty* §192). Once the position of tradition-dependent rationality is adopted, arguing against the liberal view of rationality is obvious; the very adoption of the rationality of traditions involves exclusion of the claims of its rivals. One still does invoke reasons in the face of contending traditions, but those reasons have their firm

roots in one's tradition; for instance, consider MacIntyre's appeals to "concrete facts" when he indicates the failure of the Enlightenment project.

To clarify this further, it is illuminating to take note of two perspectives involved in a rational debate. Our natural tendency is to take an "objective" standpoint in reasoning even though proposed reasons might not always strike our listeners as impersonal. MacIntyre, and of course Rawls, when arguing for or against certain approaches to the good of society and justice, take an unqualified standpoint and intend their reasons to be forceful for their opponents. However, and this is what the rationality of traditions takes into account, any reason so proposed needs to correlate with one's most immovable convictions and modes of practice in order to strike us as reasonable. Hence, no genuinely rational confrontation can be restricted to purely theoretical aspects: "Certainly the theory of practice is important, but only as in key part arising reflectively from, throwing light upon and being vindicated or failing to be vindicated by the practice of which it is the theory" ("Privatization of Good" 355)

Thus, what MacIntyre says about the fragmented state of rationality and morality in liberal societies, as we saw earlier, are not statements which hold true only from the peculiar perspective of his tradition, rather they are what he is convinced has rational foundation. Despite this certainty, MacIntyre's view also requires at least partial acknowledgement that liberals should dismiss his arguments as unfounded ("Rejoinder to my critics"). They lack the social and political institutions and forms of life in which the communal pursuit of the good is possible, and in the theoretical scaffolding which gives expression to liberal practices and modes, a shared conception of the good is neither perceivable nor desirable.

MacIntyre "explains" that Rawls's quick dismissal of the notion of desert occurs not only because Rawls is theorizing for a tradition that precludes the application of desert in considerations

of justice from the outset (*WJWR* 351). Rawls's indifference to desert also arises because he is lacking the kind of Aristotelian and Thomistic "moral experience and training" which would enable him to coordinate and make sense of human desires under an overall understanding of the human good, and even doing so strikes him as "irrational, and more likely as mad" (*WJWR* 179). From MacIntyre's Thomistic standpoint, reasoning with liberal opponents about the nature of justice comes down to pointing out formative factors of their tradition such as education. In labelling the Thomistic idea of the unity of the goods as mad, Rawls not only fails to offer an explanation but also fails to render the opponent view intelligible at all. Rawls's failure is not surprising because, in his tradition, rational comprehension and justification is solely possible within the boundaries of liberalism. When encountering theories and conceptions advanced from alien traditions we usually end up asserting our principles and convictions emphatically (see my discussion earlier in this section); but if someone like MacIntyre succeeds in going beyond assertion and tries to *explain* the differences, one would find the nature of explanation of dissimilarities fundamentally different from that of competing views within one's tradition.

Taking into account the significant differences in listeners, MacIntyre identifies those to whom his intellectual endeavors can *rationally* appeal as

someone who, not as yet having given their allegiance to some coherent tradition of enquiry, is besieged by disputes over what is just and about how it is reasonable to act, both at the level of the particular immediate issues [. . .] and at the level at which rival systematic tradition-informed conceptions contend. (*WJWR* 393)

His appeal becomes significant when one notices that more often than not contemporaries live "betwixt and between" different traditions (*WJWR* 397). Although liberalism dominantly regulates different aspects of modern life, people still draw on various other "familial, educational, [and]

religious” resources derived from various traditions and jumble these into an incoherent whole (Ibid.).

Such contingency of reasoning of individual persons, nevertheless, may be construed as the relativity of truth. MacIntyre maintains traditions are disparate systems of thought and practice which embody incompatible modes of reasoning and justification. Yet, it may be objected, this specific characterization of rationality is itself meant to hold true across traditions; therefore, it has been issued from an objective rationality standing on tradition-independent grounds. We should nevertheless bear in mind that MacIntyre does not categorize various modes of reasoning and justification according to universal rational standards and thereby conclude their incompatibility. Rather, he describes and underscores a state of fundamental difference which I shall explain in the next section. Furthermore, that rival traditions appeal to “incommensurable standards of rational justification” does not contradict their claims to unconditional truth, including those elaborated from MacIntyre’s Thomistic tradition (*After MacIntyre* 295). Asserting a statement, or even one’s mind set, as true, indeed universally true, does not entail there be a universal truth that all humans can see and affirm in virtue of their being rational beings or any other universal attribute that ensures similar premises or forms of reasoning and justification. Note that the absence of inter-traditional justification for any given claim does not mean that there can be no justification or no claim to unconditional truth. Rather this absence does mean that the justification is only possible within, and on grounds provided by, a tradition. MacIntyre does not criticize liberalism for its claims to the unconditional *truth* of its pillars. Liberalism legitimately can and does, like all other traditions including MacIntyre’s, claim that what it understands and pursues as indisputable principles of human dignity and justice are not specific to its tradition. But its claims to universal standards and methods for justifying them, in a way that everyone can understand and affirm

regardless of the tradition in which he or she inhabits, and upon applying those standards attain the same impersonal conclusions— that interestingly happen to be liberal— have simply failed.

2.8 Incommensurability: Rawls and MacIntyre

Thus far, I have briefly explained MacIntyre's concept of incommensurable traditions and rationalities, and its implications for his criticism of liberalism. It should be clear by now why MacIntyre's criticism of liberalism could be perceived differently, depending on which of two Thomistic or liberal traditions it is examined from; from the liberal perspective, it inevitably strikes one as question begging. To illustrate this further, I shall look into MacIntyre's and Rawls's theories of justice conceived of as founded on the rival traditions of, respectively, Thomism and liberalism. Theoretical and conceptual components of Rawls's and MacIntyre's views of the good and justice defy our attempts to find a commonality between the two approaches substantial enough to ground an impartial evaluation and comparison. We should, though, remember that other equally important components of the two traditions are the practices for which the two philosophers' accounts speak, the canonical texts on which they draw, and the network of conceptions and explanations of which they constitute an integral part. As I explained in the last chapter, these components cannot be exhausted theoretically. Thus, in posing MacIntyre's and Rawls's views as incommensurable, I am only loosely equating them with embodiments of the rationality of their traditions, since only "systems of thought and practice," not individual theories, can be incommensurable ("Incommensurability, Truth, and the Conversation" 109).

What two philosophers' views share might be a common criterion of justification, a subject matter, a category of inquiry, or even a common approach to a shared problem. Finding any such commonality between Rawls's and MacIntyre's views would provide the needed tool of comparison; yet, if such commonality were found, we would have already falsified MacIntyre's

conception of incommensurability. After all, the crux of the argument for a tradition–dependent rationality is the absence of any material or structural characteristic, alike in both content and relation to other parts of the system to which they belong, that can serve as a benchmark for a rational measurement of two competing traditions.

The first commonality we might think of is both philosophers being concerned with the good individual and social life. Both Rawls and MacIntyre ask about the nature of human good as well as individual and communal ways of realizing that good.

For MacIntyre, the good life can be achieved through seeking the Aristotelian *telos*, that end towards which constant endeavor in and of itself constitutes the good life. Only through collective intellectual and practical endeavors towards what is understood as the good, against the background of established and institutionalized values and practices, can individuals, as well as a community, achieve their good. According to MacIntyre’s Aristotelian view of the good human life, a shared, although partial, knowledge of the good is indispensable for adequately delineating moral virtues and justice. Contrary to this is Rawls’s view in which reason originates the good. Each rational person determines the good life for himself or herself and identifies the required means and possible ways of realizing it using the autonomous reason which characterizes all humans and, as such, is uninfected by the contingency of practices and convictions of specific societies in particular times in its core precepts. In the public sphere, practical reason identifies the rules that are morally binding and determines the requirements of justice in society.

Clearly, the conceptions of the good life MacIntyre and Rawls delineate are discrepant in both order and significance. In MacIntyre’s view, a shared comprehension of the good, embodied in the public life, is necessary for the way rational principles are conceived and moral virtues, including justice, are justified. As we saw in the last chapter, the increasingly dominant property-

centered values and modes of practice of Scottish society transformed the Aristotelian conception of reason as the master, indeed the sole master, of the passions into, as Hume articulates it, their mere slave. As opposed to this practice-based rationality, in Rawls's theory of justice practical reason is *prior to and independent from* any conception of the good to be conceived.

Rawls holds that in virtue of our being rational beings, we share moral powers the exercise of which both determine the fundamental goods of freedom and autonomy, and enables a rational conception of justice to be implemented in society. One of these moral powers is the capacity for forming, revising, and pursuing a specific conception of the good. The other "is the capacity to understand, to apply, and to act from the principles of political justice" (Rawls, *Justice as Fairness* 19). The first moral power, especially, characterizes humans in their most fundamental capability and marks their dignity. In virtue of this moral power, each person can identify his or her good. Contrary to moral rules that are rationally determinable, reaching an overall agreement as to the nature of the good is not possible due to contingencies that limit our reasoning; such contingencies are, in Rawls's terms, the burden of reason. Thus, sharing a common comprehension of the good is neither essential for determination of moral rules, as MacIntyre suggests, nor practicable as the current state of modern societies clearly shows. Yet, what humans share as to practical reason and basic moral capacities indicates the means necessary for the pursuit of any rational good. The principles determining fair ways of distributing such means constitute the precepts of justice. It only takes us proper intellectual efforts to remove contingencies—in a conception such as veil of ignorance—to see deliverances of reason as to justice.

In spite of this list of differences, the contrast between MacIntyre's and Rawls's views of the good cannot quite be conceived. Dissimilar aspects of the two conceptions can be perceived based on the similarities that brought the comparison to the mind in the first place. Discrepancies

worthy of note are limited not just to perspectives on the good but also in the understanding of reason and its relationship to the good. Indeed, any concept deemed related to the realization of the good life is conceived disparately in the two philosophers' views. Whereas MacIntyre holds that morality is mainly about virtues to be excelled in by yet-to-be virtuous agents, liberals believe morality is primarily concerned with rational rules to be followed by reasonable agents. Whereas in one school of thought justice is expressed through actions striving for the good, in the other, a just order is the most effective arrangement for people to pursue their ends (*WJWR* 34-5). In one system, justice in society is realized through institutionalized pursuit of the goods of excellence, whereas in the other, preserving each individual's right to freedom and equality constitutes its basic requirement. Each philosopher draws on resources provided by a discrete interwoven conceptual schemes. Our original question about effecting the human good seems only *prima facie* the point of divergence; further exploration of this question does not reveal any common idea or perspective. To the contrary, each philosopher's response to this question leads to the same conclusions of self-containment and incompatibility that would be found with any other conception deemed related to their accounts of justice, morality, and rationality. In investigating Rawls's and MacIntyre's thought, we encounter two complete and independent systems which entail incommensurability.

Such completeness suggests that each system presupposes some of its most central principles; every sufficiently developed and wide-ranging system of thought does so (MacIntyre "Incommensurability, Truth, And The Conversations", 108). Presumably, it is their recognition of such self-assumptions that has made both philosophers invoke criteria of coherency and explanatory power to justify the fundamental standards and approaches of their theories. But coherency can only be sought for convictions already formed, although diverse or even conflicting,

and powerful explanations are so regarded by the insight, and the strength of the connections they bring into, already somewhat settled beliefs.

As I suggested in the last chapter, MacIntyre intends the comprehensiveness of his narrations and the explanatory light they shed on prominent intellectual inquiries to justify his claims that rationality is tradition-based and that societies have been successfully organized around a specific conception of the human good. Nonetheless, such narrations are not historical reports of factual observations; there can be no such a thing. They are conceived, and conducive to being conceived, from the perspective of a tradition-based rationality. MacIntyre's complex and illustrative rendering of the increasing centrality of passions has nonetheless historically charted the accepted social, political, and academic practices of Scottish society from the standpoint of tradition-dependent rationality.

In Rawls's theory of justice, the notion of public reason can only be accounted for based on the cohesion it might confer to fundamental liberal principles. According to Rawls in *The Law of Peoples*, public reason identifies the most fundamental principles that every reasonable individual would understand and agree on as the organizing principles of a just well-ordered society, and thereby individuals are rationally required to abide by them. Given this identification, public reason determines the basic political and moral values required to regulate the relations of a society's members among themselves and with their government. Nonetheless, such a fundamental idea of reason already includes conceptions of a constitutional democratic regime, the ineradicable state of reasonable pluralism, the idea that a society's members are free and equal citizens, a certain valued set of basic rights, liberties, and opportunities, and other related

assumptions.¹ Ironically, public reason is constituted from ideas and standards that themselves are described and credited with reasonableness; as we shall see in a moment, facts that might warrant such a conception of public reason are not independently perceivable, either. As I mentioned earlier (sec. 2.2), MacIntyre notes that Rawls and many other liberal thinkers have come to recognize such circularity and are open to describing liberalism as the “tradition” whose socially and culturally accepted convictions provide the grounds for development and theorization. Such understanding of the tradition has, nonetheless, often been held in conjunction with the persuasion that liberal principles are universally valid and criticizing, rather than rejecting, its rationality can only be liberal–tradition–constituted.

Of course, each of the two competing conceptual schemes can reconceive the other in its own terms and therefore render it comparable. However, such re-conception of a rival conceptual system can only lead to its rejection. Any comprehensive conceptual scheme will reject a rival conceptualization as discrepant and, moreover, as counterfactual. For instance, from a liberal perspective, it is a historical and social “fact” that despite being reasonable, people never can concur on one specific conception of the human good without oppression, i.e., the condition of reasonable pluralism. Any account of political philosophy that conflicts with this fact would be dismissed in the preliminary of any liberal discussion about the political organization of society, as Rawls does in his text (*Justice as Fairness* 3). Of course, liberals still point to various historical and social “realities” to corroborate reasonable pluralism; however, such arguments show only that the liberal tradition accesses and comprehends social and political realities through the plurality of the goods.

¹ *The Law of Peoples*, see the chapter the idea of public reason revisited especially pages 132, 141

2.9 Does Incommensurability Legitimize Immoralities and Injustices?

It should be clear from what I have said thus far that reasoning and rational justification, according to MacIntyre, are contingent on and relative to the specific tradition of inquiry in which they are formulated. One might object that such an account of rationality would ultimately legitimize immoralities and injustices within a society. Whatever happens to be among a tradition's immovable convictions and practices would found the precepts of justice and morality within that tradition. Neither the fundamental beliefs and practices nor the rules of morality and justice they inform can be evaluated and justified according to independent principles of rationality. Such a view of practical reason could easily warrant the precept that "might makes right." If it happens, for example, that a tradition holds structurally oppressive arrangements for a specific group such as women or minorities, there would be no independent rational ground to which the oppressed people could appeal in attempting to change the status quo.

Although this worry might give us pause, it is nonetheless misguided. Note the tradition-independent standpoint assumed in raising this objection. This objection has presumed that there can be injustices in the society, perceived by particular individuals or groups, and—this is the crux of objection—so perceived based on some tradition-independent principles, which have, nevertheless, no rational grounds to be raised with the adherents of that tradition. Whereas MacIntyre maintains that if there are unjust circumstances or practices, they can be so conceived only from the standpoint of a tradition. Cruelties and injustices within a society are apprehended as such either from the standpoint of inhabitants of a tradition or from the perspective of those belonging to other traditions. Where social, political, and cultural realities of a tradition of inquiry are perceived as unjust from within, there would definitely be social and intellectual resources to

articulate and express them accordingly so that intellectual and practical endeavors can be made to overcome them. From the standpoint of an *alien* tradition, though, the discrepant social and cultural structures of a tradition *necessarily* lack rational grounds; thus, it is obvious if a tradition perceives the tenets of the other foreign tradition morally ungrounded and/or unjust. Therefore, neither from the perspective of inhabitants of a tradition nor from that of those holding alien traditions does might ever make right. Are the reasons invoked by the inhabitants of alien traditions when criticizing each other impartial as to the tradition of their allegiance? MacIntyre's answer to *this* question is negative. Nevertheless, MacIntyre holds that there is a process by which inhabitants of a tradition may come to find out the rational merits of another tradition alien to their own.

2.10 Rationality of Traditions

According to MacIntyre, every tradition has two distinct stages of activity: the stage of normal activity and the stage of crisis. I suspect MacIntyre has borrowed his distinction between normal and critical stages of a tradition from Kuhn. During the normal stage it is almost impossible for adherents of a tradition to come into rational contact with alien traditions (*WRWR* 366). Yet, MacIntyre is, at times, tempted to argue that we had better always be ready to doubt whatever rationally established beliefs we share within our tradition in order to open up a space for rational conversation with alien traditions:

[...] the only rational way for the adherents of any tradition to approach intellectually, culturally, and linguistically alien rivals is one that allows for the possibility that in one or more areas the other may be rationally superior to it in respect precisely of that in the alien tradition which it cannot as yet comprehend. (*WJWR* 388)

According to MacIntyre, any tradition of inquiry that has developed into an advanced stage would come up against some crises. In crisis times, adherents of a tradition may gradually come to realize that the problems of their tradition are increasing in number and complexity, while available resources prove insufficient and the tradition is unable to deliver required innovative conceptual and theoretical tools. Such *realization* is the first pivotal condition for the rational contact MacIntyre aspires to identify between alien traditions. Upon such realization, supporters of the tradition in crisis turn to the conceptual scheme and principles of other traditions, schemes and principles that, in Wittgenstein's terms, "nothing speaks for, everything against it", in quest of sorely needed resources (*On Certainty* § 117). MacIntyre believes that despite the conceptual and structural discrepancy between two traditions, problems defying solution in the tradition in crisis can be asked in the framework of an alien tradition and be understood as they would be in the framework of the original tradition. The possibility of communicating the same questions within two incommensurable conceptual schemes is the second crucial assumption MacIntyre makes in formulating his rationality of traditions. This assumption is a decisive point of difference between MacIntyre and Kuhn. By addressing the intractable problems of a tradition in crisis from a foreign standpoint, its adherents may find abundant theoretical and practical tools useful for overcoming problems afflicting their tradition for a long time. The alien tradition's ability to answer decisive questions about why the tradition was in crisis, why efforts from within the tradition were bound to fail, and what will solve the crisis reveals its rational superiority (*WJWR* 364-5). Thus, by its ability to answer the questions posed, the alien tradition has shown its conceptual schemes and principles are factually adequate and its claims to truth warranted. Those who were inhabiting the tradition in crisis hitherto are now rationally required to adopt the previously alien tradition.

Here, I shall briefly point out three issues with MacIntyre's conception of the rationality of traditions. First, MacIntyre presumes that the perceived impasse of a tradition in crisis can have a factual indicator. The number and complexity of problems and the available resources of a tradition do not, by themselves, indicate that the next undertaking of a tradition is one more problem to be solved, a crisis, or an impasse— I also mentioned this point in the last chapter (sec. 1.1). There can be no rational grounds for giving up on one's tradition. Put in Kuhn's terms, it is exactly loyalty to a paradigm that makes scientific research—and its rational character—possible:

Lifelong resistance, particularly from those whose productive careers have committed them to an older tradition of normal science, is not a violation of scientific standards but an index to the nature of scientific research itself. (151)

Secondly, MacIntyre claims the same question can be formulated in two incompatible traditions. Given MacIntyre's explanation of how foreign and anglicized questions of the relation of reason to the passions were *imposed* on the Scottish tradition in a time of crisis, his suggestion that the tradition in crisis may find the answer to *its own* problems in an alien tradition seems inconsistent with his historical narration (see sec. 1.1). As I argued in the last chapter, MacIntyre's narration of the Scottish tradition leaves hardly any place for independently conceived constituents such as shared principles, modes of reasoning, or facts that could ground a rational evaluation of the two Scottish and English traditions. Yet he proclaims that Hume rationally defeated the Scottish tradition; Hume *demonstrated* the Scottish tradition's inadequacy by the same premises it could not deny ("Precise of *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*" 152).

Thirdly, the conception of rationality of traditions runs counter to the crux of MacIntyre's theory of tradition-bound rationality. The rationality of traditions sets out a process which is meant to hold *between* a tradition in crisis and an alien tradition, yet this theoretical tool contradicts

MacIntyre's chief contention that any rational principle or process, when substantial and conclusive, conceives and functions within a tradition.

MacIntyre proposes a rich and arguably convincing account of the nature of reasoning and rational justification which is bound, necessarily, to a tradition of inquiry. Nevertheless, in his desire to accommodate a process for determining the rationally superior tradition, and, perhaps more importantly, to open the possibility for providing universal rational grounds for his tradition, i.e., Thomism, he introduces the conception of rationality of traditions which is at odds with the core of his claim that rationality is bound to tradition.

3. Conclusion

In the last Chapter, I argued that liberalism and Thomism are two complete and incompatible systems of thought and practice which, as such, necessarily depict incommensurable views of morality, justice, and rationality. Rational understanding, evaluation, and progress are informed from within each of these traditions, and comprehension, adoption or rejection of parts of or the whole tradition, from the standpoint of the other, is not possible; attempts for rendering each tradition comprehensible in the framework of the other necessarily leads to rejection of that tradition.

Nevertheless, liberalism and other traditions, including Thomism, do encounter one another, and such encounters necessarily happen on some material, and thereby partial, grounds. Liberalism is not only a rival to, and possibly alien to, other traditions. It is also the arbitrator between itself and other traditions, the dominant tradition which determines the framework for rational formulation and justification of claims. Various contesting traditions should not only present themselves in liberal terms and idioms, but should also restructure and reorganize their claims to fit in liberal divisions of subjects and centralize those conceptions and ideas which are pivotal to liberal understanding of issues. The significance of MacIntyre's account of rationality—and this thesis—arises from the fact that liberalism, rather than Thomism, gives a decisive role to practical reason in approaching issues of morality and justice. From MacIntyre's Aristotelian perspective, *eudaimonia*, rather than practical reason, is both fundamental to and the organizing idea of morality and justice; practical rationality is only a requirement for achieving the state of *eudaimonia*. Despite such restructuring and reconceiving in a liberal framework, or perhaps because of it, a tradition such as Thomism cannot ultimately justify its tenets against others;

according to the liberal “fact” of reasonable pluralism, no comprehensive system of thought and practice can prove its rational advantage to the others.

Two questions are in order here. First, does the dominance of liberalism in western societies and its decisive intellectual and social forces in non-liberal societies thereby show its rational superiority in these societies? Second, given this account, if the liberal framework renders other traditions rationally ungrounded, then how can MacIntyre justify Thomism within this dominant framework in western societies?

My discussion thus far should have made clear that the prominence of a tradition *per se* does not show its rational advantage. The rationality of traditions implies that in order for a tradition to show its rational warrant over others, it should narrate the process by which it has, theoretically and practically, proved warranted against others. *WJWR* narrates the rational supremacy of Thomism. Unfortunately, MacIntyre leaves the historical emergence of liberalism out of his narration. Before MacIntyre objects to liberalism controlling the terms of debate and rendering other traditions questionable, he should explain how liberalism has come to dominate the discussion. Indeed, this task has proved essential in my thesis in a number of ways. I began by the centrality of narration to MacIntyre’s account of rationality and the lack of liberal narration (see Introduction). In Chapter Two, I examined which of MacIntyre’s criticisms could decisively reject liberalism’s claims to universal rationality so that it could substitute for the lack of such narration. But we find out that such decisive rejection cannot be advanced from MacIntyre’s Thomistic position. When we add to these demands for a Thomistic narration of liberalism the question I just raised as to superiority of liberal rationality by virtue of its current dominance, it becomes clear that the present work can be best continued by articulating such narration.

As to the second question, MacIntyre suggests the encounter of traditions should not be limited to theoretical debates; rather, it should also include concrete modes of life of each of the contending traditions as they are embodied in associated practices and institutions (“Privatization of the Good” 355-6). Only then, MacIntyre contends, can Thomism rationally thrive in theoretical debates. Although such an embodiment is an essential step for the realization of any tradition, including Thomism, realizing a tradition within the dominant tradition of liberalism involves some grave challenges about which MacIntyre remains silent. Besides, even if various traditions succeed in realizing their principles and practices in associated local communities, their success by no means entails that they now are on equal footing, subjects of impartial adjudication equally qualified to shape the terms of debate. MacIntyre’s suggestion is problematic in another way. Some critics have rightly noted that MacIntyre’s recommendation for opening up public debates between traditions embodied in local communities constitutes MacIntyre’s concession to liberalism’s universal modes of justification. Given these difficulties, MacIntyre is unable to justify Thomism to liberals. Should liberals allow the adherents of Thomism to attempt developing and re-establishing their tradition in relevant local communities? Of course they should. If liberalism is genuine about praising and preserving diversity, then it must encourage exactly those traditions to flourish that do not fit into the rational frame of its understanding and principles of justification. Does such promotion and development of Thomism in a liberal society appeal to mutually accepted values and practices? They most certainly do not. Ultimately, theoretical expansions of MacIntyre are not invoking mutual principles and ideas when addressing a liberal audience nor would social realization of Thomism change this.

Yet, MacIntyre’s arguments rationally address a group of people who are of extreme importance for the preservation of any non-liberal tradition, including Thomism. Those who in

one capacity or another, adhere to a non-liberal tradition, nevertheless, aspire to render their tradition relevant to and justified in liberalism. MacIntyre's account of rationality warns them how by amending conceptions and practices according to liberal principles, their traditions lose distinction from and eventually dissolve into liberalism.

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